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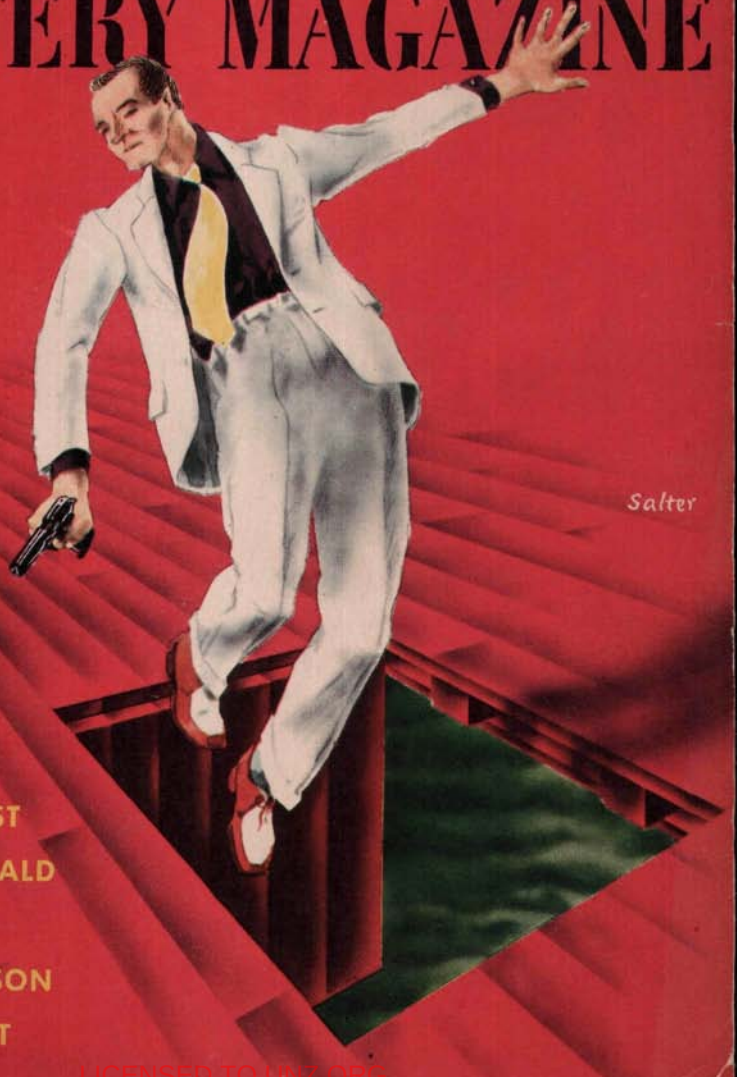

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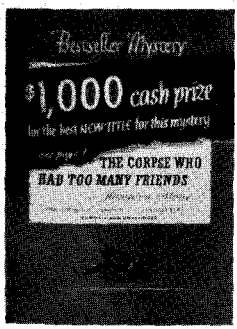

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DETECTIVE STORIES

Diamonds in Paradise	*Ellery Queen*	3
When Are People Going to Learn?	*John F. Suter*	65
The Customer Is Not Always Right	*Michael Gilbert*	123

SUSPENSE STORY

The Man Out of the Rain	*Philip MacDonald*	8

DETECTIVE NOVELETTE

Murder Plays Through	*Hugh Pentecost*	29

CRIME STORIES

The Unexpected	*Jack London*	81
Bad Check	*Hodding Carter*	96
You Know What, Teacher?	*Zenna Henderson*	134

SPY STORY

A Posteriori	*Helen Simpson*	75

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

Do a Dame a Favor?	*Norbert Davis*	99

EQMM "SPECIAL"

Best of Friends	*Babette Rosmond*	127
DETECTIVE DIRECTORY	*Robert P. Mills*	132

The best of the new and the best of the old

PUBLISHER: *Joseph W. Ferman* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: *In our August issue, last month, we called your attention to the fact that Ellery Queen's first book,* THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY, *was published on August 16, 1929; and that Queen's 80th book (including their novels, volumes of short stories, critical and bibliographic works, anthologies, juveniles, and the books edited by EQ) is to be published August 16, 1954 — the 25th anniversary, to the day, of Queen's debut in print. The 80th book is Ellery Queen's 28th novel,* THE GLASS VILLAGE.

EQMM is happy to join in the celebration of our esteemed editors' Silver Anniversary by bringing you another brand-new Queen story, written especially for the readers of EQ's own magazine. And may the Queens still be writing, editing, and researching, all at the height of their powers, on their Golden Anniversary and Diamond Jubilee!

— JOSEPH W. FERMAN

DIAMONDS IN PARADISE

by ELLERY QUEEN

MAYBE LILI MINX WAS THE GIRL of your dreams, too. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Lili caused more insomnia in her day than all the midnight maatjes herring consumed on Broadway and 51st Street on all the opening nights put together since Jenny Lind scared the gulls off the roof of Castle Garden.

It wasn't just Lili's face and figure, either, although she could have drifted out on a bare stage before a two-bit vaudeville flat and stood there for two hours and twenty minutes just looking at you, and you'd have headed for your herring mumbling "smash hit." It wasn't even her voice, which made every other set of female pipes on Broadway sound like something ground out of a box with a monkey on it. It was the trick she had of making every male within eyeshot and mike range feel that he was alone with her in a dreamboat.

Of course there was a catch, as the seven yachtsmen she married found out. With all her wonderful equipment, Lili was a mixed-up kid. She was a hopelessly incurable gambler, and she was hipped on diamonds. And the two things didn't seem to go together. Let the psychologists explain it, but the fact is money didn't mean a thing to her. She could drop ten grand at the roulette wheel and yawn like a lady. Diamonds were another story. Let her temporarily mislay a single chip from her jewel box and she went into hysterics. Her press agent swore that she checked her inventory every night before going to bed like a kid casing his marbles.

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Naturally, Lili's collection was the target of every itch-fingers out of the jug. But Lili was no pushover. When it came to her diamonds, she was like Javert in the sewers of Paris; she never gave up. The police were kept busy. They didn't mind. With La Minx on the broadcasting end of a complaint, every cop with a front porch and asthma felt like No-Hips Lancelot, the Terror of the Underworld.

Lili's favorite gambling hell, while it lasted, was Paradise Gardens. Those were the days when New York was wide open and everything went, usually before you could come back for more. Paradise Gardens had a longer run than most. It operated behind a frowsy old brownstone front off Fifth Avenue, in the Frolicking Fifties.

The ceiling was a menace to healthy eyesight, with its glittering stars and sequinned angels; you swallowed your buffalo steaks and cougar juice among tropical flowers under papier-mâché trees with wax apples tied onto them; and you were served by tired ex-showgirl-type waitresses wearing imitation fig leaves. So it was a relief to go upstairs where there was no mullarkey about gardens or Edens — just nice business décor and green baize-covered tables at which the management allowed you to lose your shirt or bra, as the case might be.

On this particular evening Lili Minx, being between husbands, was alone. She drifted in, pale and perfect in white velvet and ermine, unapproachable as the nearest star and tasty-looking as a charlotte russe. On each little pink ear glowed a cold green fire, like a radioactive pea, La Minx's only jewelry tonight. They were the famous Mumtaz green-diamond earrings, once the property of Shah Jahan's favorite wife, which had been clipped to Lili's lobes by the trembling hands of an Iraqi millionaire, who was running hard at the time in the sixth race of La Minx Handicap. Lili prized her green diamonds at least as highly as the ears to which they were attached.

Everything stopped as Lili posed in the archway for her usual moment of tribute; then life went on, and Lili bought a stack of hundred-dollar chips at the cashier's cage and made for the roulette table.

An hour later, her second stack was in the croupier's bank. Lili laughed and drifted toward the ladies' lounge, her slender fingers poised at her forehead delicately. No one spoke to her.

The trim French maid in the lounge came forward swiftly. "Madame has the headache?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps a cold compress —?"

"Please."

Lili lay down on a chaise longue and closed her eyes. At the cool touch of the wrapped icebag on her forehead she bestowed a smile. The maid adjusted the pillow about her head deftly, in sympathetic silence. It was quiet in the deserted lounge, and Lili floated off into her own world of dreams.

She awoke a few minutes later, put

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the icebag aside, and rose from the chaise. The maid had discreetly vanished. Lili went to a vanity and sat down to fix her hair . . .

And at that exact moment the gambling rooms of Paradise Gardens went berserk. Women shrieked, their escorts scuttled about like trapped crabs, the house men struggled with their nefarious tools, and the massive door gave way under the ax-heads of the police.

"Hold it!" An elderly man with a gray mustache hopped nimbly onto a crap table and held up his arms for silence. "I'm Inspector Queen of police headquarters on special gambling detail. This is a raid, ladies and gentlemen. No sense trying to make a break; every exit is covered. Now if you'll all please line up along the walls while these officers get going —"

And that was when Lili Minx burst from the ladies' lounge like one of the Furies, screaming, "My diamond earrings! I been robbed!"

So immediately what had begun as a gambling raid turned into a robbery investigation. La Minx was in top form, and Inspector Queen did her bidding as meekly as a rookie cop. She had often enough disturbed his dreams, too.

As the axes rose and fell and the equipment flew apart, the Inspector was crooning, "Now don't you worry your pretty head, Miss Minx. We'll find your earrings —"

"And that creep of a maid!" stormed La Minx. "She's the only one who touched me, Inspector Queen. I want that maid clobbered, too!"

"She can't get away, Lili," soothed the Inspector, patting the lovely hand. "We've had the Paradise surrounded for an hour, getting set for the jump, and not a soul got out. So she has to be here . . . Well, Velie?" he barked, as the big Sergeant came loping from the ladies' lounge, furtively feeling his tie. "Where is the woman?"

"Right here," said Sergeant Velie, looking at Lili like a homesick Newfoundland. And he thrust into Inspector Queen's hands, blindly, a maid's uniform, a starched cap and apron, a pair of high-heeled shoes, two sheer stockings, and a wig. "Dumped in the broom closet."

"What does this mean?" cried Lili, staring at the wig.

"Why, it's Harry the Actor," said the Inspector, pleased. "A clever character at female impersonation, Lili — he's made his finest hauls as a French maid. So Harry's tried it on you, has he? You just wait here, my dear," and the Inspector began to march along the lineup like a small gray Fate, followed by La Minx, who waited for no one.

"And here he is," said the Inspector cheerily, stopping before a short slender man with boyish cheeks which were very pale at the moment. "Tough luck, Harry — about the raid, I mean. Suppose we try this on for size, shall we?" and he clapped the wig on the little man's head.

"That's the one," said Lili Minx in

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a throbbing voice, and the little man turned a shade paler. She stepped up to him, and looked deep into his eyes. "You give me back my diamond earrings, or —" She mentioned several alternatives.

"Get her away from me, get her out of here," quavered Harry the Actor in his girlish treble, trying to burrow into the wall.

"Search him, Velie," said Inspector Queen sternly.

A half hour later, in the manager's office, with the drapes drawn before the window, Harry the Actor stood shivering. On the desk lay his clothes and everything taken from his person — a wallet containing several hundred dollars, a pocketful of loose change, a ball of hard candy, a yellow pencil, a racing form, a pair of battered old dice, a crumpled cigarette pack and a booklet of matches, a tiny vial of French perfume, a lipstick, a compact, a handkerchief smeared with makeup, and a box of Kiss-Mee, the Magic Breath-Sweetener. Everything in parts had been disassembled. The cigarettes had been shredded. The hard candy had been smashed. Harry's clothing had been gone over stitch by stitch. His shoes had been tapped for hidden compartments. His mouth and hair had been probed. Various other indignities had been visited upon his person. Even the maid's outfit had been examined.

And no green-diamond earrings.

"All right," muttered the Inspector, "get dressed."

And all the while, from the other side of the manager's door, Lili's creamy voice kept promising Harry what was in store for him as soon as she could get her little hands on him.

And it drove the thief at last to a desperate folly. In the midst of stuffing his belongings back in his pockets, he leaped over the desk, stiff-armed the officer before the window, and plunged head first through the drapes like a goat. It was a hard-luck night for Harry the Actor all around. The railing of the fire escape was rotted through with rust. His momentum took him into space, carrying the railing with him.

They heard the railing land on the concrete of the backyard three stories below, then Harry.

The officers posted in the yard were shaking their heads over the little man when Inspector Queen and Sergeant Velie dropped off the fire-escape ladder, followed — inevitably — by Lili.

If the thief had had any hope of cheating his fate, one glazed look at the furious beauty glaring down at him destroyed it. Either way he was a goner, and he knew it.

"Harry," said Inspector Queen, tapping the swollen cheek gently. "You're checking out. If you want a fair shake Upstairs, you'd better talk fast. Where did you stash 'em?"

Harry's eyes rolled. Then his tongue came out and he said thickly, "Diamonds . . . in . . . the Paradise . . ."

"In the Paradise *what*, Harry?" asked the Inspector frantically, as

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Harry stopped. "In the Paradise *where*?"

But Harry had had it.

Ellery always said that, if it wasn't his greatest case, it was certainly his shortest.

He first learned about it when his father staggered home at breakfast time. Ellery got some coffee into the old man and extracted the maddening details.

"And I tell you, son," raved the Inspector, "we went back into that joint and tore it apart. It was rotten luck that Harry died before he could tell us just where in the Paradise Gardens he'd hidden Lili's diamonds. They had to be in the building somewhere, either in something or on someone. We still hadn't let anyone go from the raid. We not only took the Paradise apart piece by piece, we body-searched every mother's son and daughter on the premises, thinking Harry might have passed the earrings to an accomplice. Well, we didn't find them!" The Inspector sounded as if he were going to cry. "I don't know what I'll say to that lovely child."

"Diamonds speak louder than words," said Ellery briskly. "At least — from all I hear — in the case of Lili Minx."

"You mean . . . ?" said his father. "But how *can* you know where the Actor hid them?" he cried. "You weren't even there!"

"You told me. Harry was putting his belongings away in his pockets when he made his sudden break. Where is Harry now, dad?"

"Harry? In the Morgue!"

"Then the Morgue is where Lili's earrings are."

"They were *on* him? But Ellery, we searched Harry outside and — and in!"

"Tell me again," said Ellery, "what he had in his pockets."

"Money, a dirty handkerchief, women's cosmetics, a hard candy, a racing form, cigarettes, a pair of dice, a pencil — "

"I quote you quoting the late Actor's dying statement," said Ellery. " 'Diamonds — in — Paradise.' "

"Paradise . . ." The Inspector's jaw wiggled. "*Pair o' dice!* His dice were just shells — *they're in the dice!*"

"So if you'll phone the Morgue property clerk, dad —"

Inspector Queen turned feebly from the phone. "But Ellery, it did sound just like the word Paradise . . ."

"What do you expect from a dying man," asked Ellery reasonably, "elocution lessons?"

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

Up until last year Philip MacDonald had won four Second Prizes in EQMM's Annual Contests. These four short stories, together with two novelettes, made up Mr. MacDonald's book, SOMETHING TO HIDE, *which was awarded the coveted Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America as the best book of mystery short stories published in 1952. That will give you some idea as to the quality of the four prize-winning stories. Another indication of their quality is the fact that* SOMETHING TO HIDE *is one of the very few books of detective shorts published in recent years that has sold well enough to go past a first edition. And still another indication — at least, in your Editors' opinion — is the fact that, unofficially,* SOMETHING TO HIDE *is keybook Number 108 in Queen's Quorum (of beloved memory).*

Surely the titles of Mr. MacDonald's earlier prize-winning stories will bring back vivid recollections — "Malice Domestic," "The Wood-for-the-Trees" (the first short story about Colonel Anthony Gethryn), "The Green-and-Gold String" (the first story about Dr. Alcazar), and "Love Lies Bleeding," that daringly offbeat story with, it has been said, "a shock ending unsurpassed in the realms of the short-story thriller."

Now, after a lapse of three years during which he was sorely missed, Philip MacDonald has won another Second Prize — his fifth in five contest entries, a record matched only by such an outstanding contributor as Stanley Ellin. Mr. MacDonald's new story, "The Man Out of the Rain," is a tale of suspense and terror in a Southern California cloudburst. Indeed, we might call upon two other sources to describe "The Man Out of the Rain": Anthony Boucher once wrote about another MacDonald story: "Here is a story of pure horror . . . brooding horror impinging upon the most casual and ordinary every-day life." True, a flood is not the most casual of everyday occurrences, but the spirit of Mr. Boucher's judgment remains. And we could also quote the final paragraph in the Introduction to SOMETHING TO HIDE *(identity of writer unknown): "All the ingredients to tempt the mystery reader's palate — and to make converts of those who have never before tasted murder [vicariously, of course!] — are here: humor, horror, psychology, and good storytelling. In short, the best from the pen of Philip MacDonald."*

It is a great pleasure and privilege to welcome Philip MacDonald back to the pages of EQMM. May this be the first of a new series of stories from his talented 'tec typewriter . . .

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THE MAN OUT OF THE RAIN

by PHILIP MACDONALD

ALTHOUGH IT HAD BEEN RAINING, off and on, for several days, it wasn't until Monday night that anyone took it seriously. But then it went on through Tuesday, and Tuesday night, and in that twenty-four hours nearly five inches of rain fell in Greater Los Angeles. Conditions were bad everywhere; but along the semirural stretch of Sunset, from Beverly Hills to the Palisades, they were almost disastrous, particularly in the canyons, down which brown rivers poured, carrying from the hills thousands of tons of silt which spread along the roads, twisting and distorting and completely blocking them.

On Wednesday it hardly rained at all, and scrapers and trucks labored furiously, and by Thursday morning had got around to the small canyons like Oak and Cochise. By noon they had cleared a one-way lane for residents to drive in and out, but then it started to rain again.

There was a radio warning that this was the start of another deluge, but many people didn't hear it — among them Mrs. Tyrrel, who was marketing in Beverly Hills with her six-year-old daughter, Wendy. Mrs. Tyrrel, who was small and shapely and attractive, was exactly twenty years older than her only child, and, actually, as pleasantly excited by the past few days as her offspring. The only fly in the ointment was the absence in the East of Richard, her husband and Wendy's father.

It was after 5 when Mrs. Tyrrel headed for home, Wendy asleep beside her. It was still raining steadily, but she never considered the frightening possibility of not being able to get back until she saw water rushing from all the hill roads and found a sawhorse barrier across the mouth of Oak Canyon. There was also a policeman — water shining on his slicker and boots — who became a big face in the window as she stopped the car.

He shook his head. "You can't go through, lady," he said.

"I don't want to go *through*, Officer," said Mrs. Tyrrel. "I want to go *home* — Number 1063, about a mile up —"

He shook his head again, and she summoned her forces for a thunderous and convincing lie. "But I *have* to, Officer. My little boy's all alone." She pointed to the huge carton on the back seat. "I just went out to buy food."

"We-ell," said the face doubtfully, and then, "It'll be your own risk, lady."

"Oh, thank you, Officer!" said Mrs. Tyrrel. "Thank you!" The weight against her arm lessened and Wendy sat up, rubbing her eyes.

Mrs. Tyrrel watched the policeman moving the barrier. The rain was drumming on the car roof with in-

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creasing force, and as they drove slowly through the narrow gap, Wendy squealed delightedly, "The water! Look at the water! It's more'n it was — *lots* more!"

Mrs. Tyrrel knew it was. She could see it swirling down toward her, brown and angry; she could feel it tugging at the wheels. But it wasn't until she had rounded the first bend that the going became a nightmare. The new torrents had redistributed the huge bank of silt the scrapers had pushed to one side, and she had to drive not only through a viscous stream but around pot-holes and soft spots and half-buried obstructions.

When, finally, she saw her garage and the steps, and the house looking serenely down at her through the shimmering veil of rain, she almost cried with relief. But as she headed into the sloping driveway, two misfortunes struck simultaneously.

The engine stalled and the young oak by the mail-box chose that moment to surrender to the pressure of the piling mud. There was a sucking crackle as it tore loose from the sodden soil and swayed and fell slowly forward.

Mrs. Tyrrel gripped Wendy convulsively, trying to cover the squirming little body with her own.

But nothing happened, except a jar which shook the car's framework as the tree struck the roof and stayed there.

Mrs. Tyrrel opened her eyes and sat very still for a moment. Wendy, unpredictable child, seemed unperturbed. She said, "O-oh, look, Mother! The tree fell down. Why did it fall down, Mother?"

And then the man came out of the rain. He tapped on the window, peering in past the tree trunk. He said something they couldn't catch, but his gesture meant, "Stay where you are."

Mrs. Tyrrel beamed at him gratefully as he moved to the front of the the car, his figure indeterminate in the rain-blurred half light. He climbed onto the bumper, reached up, and slowly, its branches grating on the roof, the tree came off the car. He pulled it to one side and then, as he let it go, slipped and fell full-length into eighteen inches of water and slime.

But he was up at once and splashing to the garage. He opened the door and waved her on. Miraculously, the engine started with her first touch, and she drove in.

When she got out, Wendy wriggling after her, she found the man standing just inside the door. She couldn't see him clearly in the dimness, but he was tall and seemed young. When she tried to thank him he said, "Think nothing of it," and jerked a thumb over his shoulder, pointing up the canyon. "*My* car's up there," he said. "Landslide."

The rain was heavier now, beating on the roof so hard that Mrs. Tyrrel had to raise her voice as she insisted, looking at her rescuer's sodden and mud-caked clothes, that he come up to the house and get dry.

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"Well, I wouldn't mind," he said, and volunteered to carry up the carton of groceries while she ran ahead with Wendy.

There were 67 steps up to the house, which perched on a shelf high in the canyon-side. Mrs. Tyrrel took her daughter up as fast as they could run through the sheetlike rain, and then, leaving her on the porch, turned breathlessly back to give her helper a hand. But he was almost on her heels, panting a little under his burden.

He dumped it down and started to say something which was lost in a grumbling rumble from below, and they turned quickly to see the concrete retaining wall of the steps collapse, and the steps themselves buried under masses of wet brown earth.

Wendy couldn't see, but the ominous sound had frightened her. She said, "What happened? What was that funny noise, Mother?"

"It wasn't anything, darling," Mrs. Tyrrel said. "Just some mud falling." She saw the man had picked up the carton again and said to him, "Oh, *thank* you," and led the way into the house and around to the kitchen.

The man put the carton down on the side of the sink and stood with muddy water dripping from him. He pulled off his hat, showing a head of thick lank hair, almost black. He said, "Phew! This is *rain!*" and smiled at Mrs. Tyrrel, showing a line of gum over white, slightly projecting teeth. He was even younger than she'd thought, she saw now — 25 at most, with the kind of faintly-pimpled skin a doctor had probably told him would clear up in a year or so. He had very large, dark-brown eyes, with a sort of lost-dog look in them which made Mrs. Tyrrel feel very motherly.

She was just saying, "Now we must fix you up with a shower and some dry clothes —" when Wendy came running across and clutched at her skirt and said, "Mother, Mother, I don't want the man to stay! Make him go away, Mother!"

"*Wendy!*" Mrs. Tyrrel was horrified. "That's very rude! Say you're sorry — at once!"

Wendy buried her face against her mother's leg. "I'm *not* sorry," she mumbled. "I want him to go *away* —"

Mrs. Tyrrel saw with relief that the man was smiling. She said sternly, "You apologize, Wendy! If Daddy was here you wouldn't get a second chance like this."

Wendy looked down at the floor. "Daddy's in New York," she said sullenly.

The man put his hand on Wendy's shoulder. He said, "Come on, old-timer, don't be like this. What's the matter with me, anyway?"

Wendy lifted her head and looked at him. She said, distinctly, "I don't like your face," and burst into tears.

"That's enough!" Mrs. Tyrrel was very angry. "Go to your room and undress — and go to bed."

Wendy ran out sobbing, and Mrs. Tyrrel looked at the man and shook her head. "*Children!*" she said, and added feebly, "I'm awfully sorry —"

"Think nothing of it." He gave

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little laugh which was almost a giggle, but his shoulders twitched under the sodden coat, and Mrs. Tyrrel saw that he was shivering.

This jolted her out of her embarrassment, and she became furiously busy for an hour, at the end of which she was just turning on lights in the living-room when she heard her visitor's step in the passage, coming from the guest room.

When he came in, wearing the old clothes of Richard's she'd found for him, she had a funny feeling for a moment that he looked like Richard. But then she switched on more lights and saw that he didn't at all. He was as tall as Richard, but much more slightly built, so that the tweed jacket and the gray slacks flapped around him. She asked how he felt, and he said, "Great," and looked down at himself complacently. "Not such a bad fit, huh?" He felt the tweed with a finger and thumb. "Swell material!" he said.

For some reason this made Mrs. Tyrrel feel faintly uncomfortable. "Don't you think it's time we introduced ourselves?" she said. "My name's Tyrrel —"

"Mine's Zakka," he said. "Jack Zakka." He held out a hand which seemed too big for the rest of him, and Mrs. Tyrrel let hers become engulfed in it, rather painfully.

And then he looked down at her and said, "I sure appreciate everything — the shower and the clothes and all." He felt the tweed of the old jacket again. "But I was wonderin' — do you maybe have a shot of liquor around?"

Mrs. Tyrrel, who had been about to suggest a drink at this very moment, felt a twinge of annoyance. But she smiled and said, "Great minds, Mr. Zakka," and went to the kitchen and fetched ice and an orange and took them into the dining room to Richard's little bar. Carefully, she made two old-fashioneds and put the glasses on a tray and carried them back to the living room. Zakka was by the big window. He had pulled back the curtains and was peering out into the drenched darkness.

"Know something," he said, "it's going to be plenty tough gettin' down to the road . . ."

Mrs. Tyrrel put the tray on the coffee table. She was conscious, for the first time since she'd come in, of the ceaseless drumming of the rain. She said vaguely, "Yes, I suppose it will . . ." and picked up his drink and held it out to him.

"Thanks," he said. "Skoal . . ." He took one swallow, and then another. He lowered the glass and looked at her. "You're a swell mixologist," he said.

Mrs. Tyrrel glanced up at him, and then walked to the window and closed the curtains. The hand she put up to them wasn't quite steady. She had just made the disturbing discovery that she agreed with her daughter; she didn't like the man's face, and she wanted the man to go away . . .

She took herself firmly in hand.

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She thought: *This is ridiculous! He's only a boy with bad manners. And where would we have been without him!*

She went back and picked up her glass. She took a much bigger swallow than she'd meant to and only just stopped herself from choking. There was a momentary singing in her ears, and when it died down she heard:

" . . . wouldn't be worth it. Not seeing you've got that extra room an' bed, huh?"

Mrs. Tyrrel thought: *Oh, no!* But she said, "Of course . . . of course . . ."

She suddenly wanted to talk to someone else, anyone else. She thought of the telephone and crossed to it, and had started dialing Grace Turloch's number before she realized she'd heard no dial-tone.

She replaced the receiver and tried again, but it was useless. The line was dead. From behind her, Zakka said, "What's the matter — on the blink?" — and Mrs. Tyrrel hung up. "Yes," she said. "But it's not surprising in this storm, I suppose . . ."

"You sure can get isolated up in these canyons," Zakka said. "Might as well be in the middle of nowhere." He held up his empty glass. "Would there be another of these?"

"I think there's enough," said Mrs. Tyrrel slowly. She took the glass from him. "I'll see . . ."

She went back to the dining room and the bar. Her feelings were muddled and indefinable, but she didn't like them. She dropped a lump of sugar into Zakka's glass and thought: *I won't make this one so strong* — and his voice came from immediately behind her.

"Never mind the trimmin's," he said, and Mrs. Tyrrel whirled around to see him in the doorway. She cried out, "*Oh!* You startled me!" — and then, to do something, she picked up the bottle. To say something, she said, "Oh, do you really prefer it straight?"

"We-ell," he said, "it sure is good whiskey —" He reached out and took the bottle from her hand and poured himself a drink which half-filled his glass. "How about you?" he asked, and proferred the bottle. "Don't *you* want to drown your sorrows?"

Mrs. Tyrrel thought: *The only way is not to notice.* She said, "Not just now, thanks," as casually as she could. She led the way back to the living room and he followed, glass in one hand, bottle in the other. She got him seated and then, still elaborately casual, went off to get Wendy her dinner.

When she took the tray in, Wendy, sulking, sat up in bed but wouldn't speak to her. With great self-control Mrs. Tyrrel decided that this was all to the good and was just entering the living room again when the music started. It was the *Gaieté Parisienne* ballet, and she found Zakka sitting on the floor in front of the big cabinet with records strewn all around him and a stack on the machine.

His glass was beside him, and the bottle was on the chess table, where he could reach up to it easily. He

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heart sank as she saw how little there was left in it. The music was so loud that the throb of the bass seemed to be shaking the floor, and she walked past him and said, "That's awfully loud," and turned the volume down to halfway.

He looked up and smiled vaguely. He said, "I like loud music." And then he said, "Keeps a fella from thinking . . ."

There was no particular emphasis on the words, but Mrs. Tyrrel didn't care for them. And she didn't care for the way he looked as he said them. A little shiver ran over her, and she wondered how she'd ever thought his eyes were like a lost dog's.

She said, too brightly for naturalness, "I hope you're hungry, because I'm starving! I'm going to fix us something to eat, right now."

He didn't answer. He reached up for the whiskey, and poured all that was left into his glass.

She went out into the kitchen. Automatically she put lamb chops to broil, and started the vegetables. The five words he'd said went on running through her mind.

Keeps a fella from thinking. Keeps a fella from thinking . . .

Keeps him from thinking about *what?* Or did he mean: keeps him from *remembering?* That's what his eyes had looked like. But *what* didn't he want to remember?

She forced herself to stop. She set places in the breakfast nook, dished out the food when it was ready, and went across the passage and called him. He came at once, a little unsteady on his feet. He'd left the phonograph still on, with the last record repeating.

He went to the table and sat down, and she distinctly heard the bump of something heavy and metallic in his pocket as it struck the back of the booth. The sound conjured up an instant picture in her mind. She tried to tell herself she was hysterical, had been reading too many thrillers; but it didn't work.

Zakka yawned, and his head nodded, the lank black hair flopping over his spotty forehead. *He's on the way,* she thought suddenly. *Why not make him* really *drunk? Maybe he'll pass out . . .*

She found a bottle of burgundy, and poured a full glass for him. Before she had picked up her knife and fork he was eating. Between mouthfuls, he gulped down the wine. He said, "Swell dinner, if I may say so," and she refilled his glass . . .

By the end of the meal he had almost finished the bottle, but the results were the reverse of what she wanted. There was no more yawning, no more head-nodding. Instead, he was sitting upright, as if he were trying to fill Richard's coat with his shoulders, and his face was flushed. He didn't talk much, but ate everything voraciously, and when Mrs. Tyrrel said they might as well have coffee in the living room, he got to his feet with alacrity and insisted on carrying the tray. His eyes were less like a lost dog's than ever. They were

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wide, with a glitter in them, and seemed to have grown oddly darker.

But — and Mrs. Tyrrel told herself this over and over again — he had done nothing, said nothing, that any youngster of his type might not have done and said. She thought, determinedly: *It's all my imagination!* — and went to Wendy's room, leaving him busily changing the records on the victrola.

Wendy was fast asleep, her dinner dishes set neatly on a chair. Mrs. Tyrrel kissed her gently, and tiptoed out. It was just as she reached the kitchen that a new record blared out, the volume turned on full again. This time it was Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance*, and the swelling sound was like a blow on the head.

She hurried, almost running, to the living room, but then stopped dead as she saw Zakka turning away from the bar. In one hand he held an unopened bottle of whiskey, in the other two glasses. He grinned at her and held up the bottle. "Just what the doctor ordered," he said. "Come on . . ."

Mrs. Tyrrel said, "That music's *much* too loud — it'll wake Wendy." In her mixed emotions anger was uppermost, and it carried her quickly to the far door of the dining room. Too quickly, because she collided with Zakka in the doorway.

She bumped into his back, hard. There was a bruised pain in her side, and she knew beyond any doubt now that what he was carrying in his hip pocket *was* a gun . . .

She mumbled something, anything. She thought: *I mustn't have noticed it! I mustn't have noticed it!* — and found herself across the passage and in the living room, turning down the roaring volume of the music. Thoughts rushed through her mind, showing her everything in one disordered and terrifying picture: the steps washed away; the phone out of order; the roaring brown river where the road should be; Richard in New York, worried by the California news and trying vainly to get a call through; Wendy fast asleep . . .

She heard Zakka behind her and whipped around, fearful even as she made the movement that he would see it and know she was afraid.

But he wasn't looking at her. He had put the glasses down on the coffee table and was opening the bottle. The cork plopped out, and he looked at her and said, "Guess you must think I got plenty of nerve — helpin' myself to everything and all."

He tipped the bottle over one of the glasses, filling it nearly half full. "But I been findin' out," he said. "I mean about people, an' how a fella's gotta handle 'em — stop 'em walkin' all over him, if you get what I mean —"

He broke off and said, "Hey, I forgot you," and splashed whiskey into the second glass. He handed it to Mrs. Tyrrel, and as her unwilling fingers closed around it, the power failed.

The lights went out and the music was cut off in the middle of a bar.

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Through the instant blackness, the drumming of the rain on the roof seemed extraordinarily loud, and it was mixed with another sound Mrs. Tyrrel hadn't been conscious of before — the swirling roar of the floodwater below.

Zakka's giggling laugh cut through the darkness. "Fuse blown?" came his voice, and Mrs. Tyrrel heard her voice saying, "No, I'm afraid it's the power . . ."

She heard him move. Her eyes were adjusting now and she could see him as a faint tall shape at the window, lifting the curtain and peering out. He said, "Guess you're right — there's no light any place."

Mrs. Tyrrel said, "I'll get candles," and somehow felt her way to the dining room. She wasn't thinking; she daren't let herself think. She found the wall cupboard and put her hand on the box of candles. She turned to the bar for matches — and bumped full into Zakka in the darkness.

Her heart jumped up into her throat and she choked back a scream. He said, "*Oops* there!" and gave his giggling laugh. "Find the candles?"

She managed to say, "Here they are," and thrust the box at him. His hands grasped it, and in a moment he'd taken one out and lighted it.

"That's better," he said, and held it up so that its yellow flame pushed the darkness back from a little circle beyond which everything else seemed blacker than before.

He was looking down at her, and she saw his eyes clearly — and the light in them. It was an odd, unnatural light; a light she knew she would never see in the eyes of any human being who was sane.

Panic froze her, but she found herself following him back to the living room, helping him as he set candles around. Her legs felt weak, and she sank heavily into the nearest chair.

Zakka picked up his glass and walked over to the couch. In the flickering light his figure cast a monstrous shadow. He sat down, sprawling, his head tilted toward the ceiling. He said, suddenly, "This rain keeps on, we'll be cut off for days." His odd little laugh punctuated the words, and the worst shiver of all went through Mrs. Tyrrel.

"Suits me," he went on. "If y'want to know, it suits me fine!" He drained his glass. He said, "I got my reasons," and pulled the cushions behind his head, put his legs up, and lay back.

Mrs. Tyrrel sat rigid. Her mind pieced everything together: *keeps a fella from remembering* — and the gun — and the eyes — and now, *Suits me fine, I got my reasons.*

She didn't know what the total of these might mean. She cringed away from knowing. But she did know what she was going to do . . .

It was hours she waited, while the candles flickered and the rain pounded overhead and the man on the couch twisted and turned, sleeping for moments, then waking convulsively, alternately muttering and keeping si-

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lent, sometimes staring with wide eyes, sometimes covering them with his hands . . .

But at last he was still, and his breathing became deep and regular.

She stood up, and tiptoed out of the room. Her heart was thumping, and it was difficult to breathe. She was in the pitch darkness of the passage. She was near Wendy's room. Her mind raced over what she must do. Wake Wendy; bundle her into a coat; steal out of the back door with her; slip or slide, fall or roll, down the hillside . . .

She had her fingers on the handle of Wendy's door when there was a movement behind her, and a soft yellow light.

She turned her head — slowly, as if it were being forced around against her will. She saw him coming toward her, candle in hand. He said thickly, "Anything wrong?" and she shook her head and pretended she was just shutting the door. She couldn't speak, and with the ingenuity of desperation she put a finger to her lips for silence.

And then — then she was back in the living room. There was nowhere else to go, nothing else to do. She was back in the living room, and back in the same chair.

Zakka stood looming over her. He said, "How 'bout a little drinkie?" — and she shook her head.

He picked up the bottle and gulped from it. "Kid asleep, huh?" he said, and then, when she nodded, "Guess I was gettin' sush-suspicious. I figured you were tryin' to duck out on me.

She had to speak now. She said "What an extraordinary idea!" with hardly a quaver.

"Guess I was haywire," he muttered, and went back to the couch and sat down, staring at her.

"It's what I been through," he said. "You wouldn't believe it — what I been through . . ." He shook his head slowly, swung his legs up and dropped back on the cushions.

Mrs. Tyrrel thought: *Maybe he'll go to sleep again! Maybe he'll go to sleep again!*

But he didn't. He didn't say another more, but she knew he wasn't asleep. She rested her head against the chair and tried to close her eyes. But they wouldn't stay shut. It seemed to her there was no sound in the world except the sound of water — the drum of the rain and the roar of the flood.

Then his voice once more, thick and stammering, "I couldn' help it. How could I help it? I told 'em didn't I! Time an' time I told 'em . . ."

Another silence . . . another endless wait . . . endless minutes ticking by in an endless chain to the accompaniment of the endless water sounds . . . The clock at the far end of the room chiming softly — at what seemed strangely irregular intervals . . .

And then the cramping in her leg. Little twinges at first, but at last after a long long interval, an agonizing knot which brought a startled exclamation from her and a quick

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movement as she bent to rub at the knotted muscle.

Zakka sat up — so quickly that the candle near him flickered. "What's wrong?" he said. "What happened?"

"Nothing," she heard herself saying. "Just a muscle cramp . . ." The massage eased the pain and she summoned her courage and looked at him. "It's nearly morning — I think I'll go to bed."

He was staring at her. There was a shadow across his face and she couldn't see his eyes. He said, "No!" and then, much louder, "*No!* I don't want to be by myself," and he lay down again.

More silence and more water sounds . . . more chimings from the clock . . . A metric phrase beating through her head — *Please don't let Wendy wake — please don't let Wendy wake* . . .

Then gray daylight showing through the curtains . . . and wild projects swimming through her mind — like running out of the room and locking herself in with Wendy, or darting across and picking up the whiskey bottle from the floor and bringing it down on his head. . .

Or the telephone! Suppose it was working again — and suppose he went to sleep!

Like an answer to prayer, there came a muffled snoring from the couch.

She slid off the chair and inched her way, barely breathing, across to the telephone — and lifted it — and put it to her ear . . .

The line was still dead.

She started to replace the receiver, but somehow it slipped from her unsteady hand and fell clattering onto the table.

In one convulsive movement Zakka bounded up and was rushing at her. His outflung hand thrust her violently back against the wall. He snatched up the receiver and clapped it to his ear. He was half crouching; he looked like an animal. He slammed the thing back on its base and wheeled on her.

"So I was right the first time!" He was breathing harshly, noisily. "Okay, so now I know!" His hand clamped iron fingers on her shoulder and thrust her into a chair with a crash which took her breath away.

He stood over her. He said, "An' I figured you was different!" He was panting. He said, "Now you listen: I got my reasons for stayin' here, long as this storm keeps up. You an' the kid do what I say an' everything'll be all right. You don't — and it'll be just too bad . . ."

He stood looking down at her. She didn't want to see his face, but she couldn't take her eyes away from it.

"It's like I was tellin' you —" he seemed to be talking to himself — "about what I been through . . ." His voice wavered. "You keep takin' it from everybody," he muttered. "Keep takin' it all your life . . . An' it piles up inside you an' all of a sudden you can't take it any more —"

He stopped in mid-sentence, and Mrs. Tyrrel, who had a dreadful

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feeling that she was going to throw up at any moment, saw him look up at the ceiling in surprise. Without her volition, her gaze followed his, but until he spoke again she didn't realize what they both had seen — the bulbs in the ceiling lamp glowing yellow in the growing daylight.

"Power on again, huh?" he said, and looked around at the other lamps. Then, as if struck by their yellowness, he seemed to realize that the night was over. He looked down at Mrs. Tyrrel in the chair — and turned away from her and walked over to the big windows and pulled the curtains back.

Gray, rain-shimmering light poured sluggishly into the room. The candle flames faded. Mrs. Tyrrel drew in a deep, noiseless breath and tried to will her heart to stop banging about in her throat. She looked at Zakka's back, with Richard's coat hanging loose and ungainly about it. Thoughts raced and chattered through her mind, but she didn't know what they were about.

Zakka wheeled around, walked over to the couch, bent down, and picked up the whiskey bottle — but before it touched his lips his face contorted into a grimace which curled the lips back from the gums and seemed to paint the flesh of the lean cheeks a greenish yellow. He shuddered, put the bottle down with a thud on the top of the phonograph-cabinet, and started toward her.

She felt herself cringing back into the chair, and ordered herself not to cringe. She didn't know it, but she sat up very straight and looked at him and didn't move at all.

He stopped a pace away from her. He said, "Coffee, huh?" — and then, as if he weren't sure whether he'd spoken or not, "How's about some java?"

Mrs. Tyrrel found herself standing up, on surprisingly normal legs, and walking into the kitchen and pulling the curtains back, and seeing the sheer wet earth of the canyon-side shooting straight up, through the never-ending veil of rain, into the tangle of trees and scrub she knew was there but couldn't see.

She could feel Zakka only a step behind her, but somehow she contrived to prepare coffee and set it to brew, and at last he sat in the chair by the table next the stove and started to fiddle with the dials of the little kitchen radio Richard had given her last Christmas.

It was as she took cups and saucers from the cupboard that she noticed, with a tingle of surprise, that her hands were steady. And the tingle grew and spread, and she suddenly knew what she was thinking about so desperately.

Don't let Wendy wake yet! Please, please make her sleep late!

Now her hands were shaking again. Desperately, she tried to block out thought by concentrating on the coffee as it bubbled into the big glass globe. She didn't look at Zakka. There was music coming from the radio now, a rhythmic Dixie-ish sort

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of tune, but it changed suddenly as he switched to another station, and a man's voice took over, blaring out an early news bulletin.

The coffee was boiling in the globe and her fingers turned off the heat and picked up a spoon and gently stirred the brown liquid. Spasmodically — as if her ears were receivers switching on and off at irregular intervals — the voice from the radio forced itself into her mind.

". . . a state of emergency in Los Angeles and surrounding districts. . . . Worst hit are the canyons between the Valley and Beverly Hills, Hollywood and Santa Monica, where in several cases residents are entirely cut off . . ."

She took the globe with its long stem out of the pot and laid it in the sink, the glass rattling against the porcelain with the shaking of her hand. The voice stopped abruptly, then started again on a different, sharper note. She heard, jerkily, the words "Flash" and "Police" — and then more mouthings which, as the duo-syllable "Zakka" stabbed into her mind, suddenly became a stream of clarity.

". . . This man is wanted in connection with the triple slaying in Glendale this afternoon, when his father, George Zakka, his sister-in-law, Mrs. Earl Zakka, and an eight-year-old niece, Valerie Zakka, were shot to death. Jack Zakka was seen to run from the house and drive away in his car, a gray '42 Ford sedan with the license number LXX–4324. . . . I will repeat that — a Ford sedan, gray color, with the license number LXX–4324. Zakka's description is as follows: age, 23; height, six feet; weight, about 165; dark hair and eyes; clean-shaved; sallow complexion. When last seen, he was wearing a brown hat, and a drab raincoat over sports jacket and brown trousers. If any listener has seen the car, or a man answering this description, they are requested to communicate at once with the police."

There was a click, and the voice stopped abruptly as Zakka cut the switch. Mrs. Tyrrel hadn't wanted to look at him, hadn't been able to look at him, but now she felt her head turning so that she could look at him. He was still sitting at the table, his hand just coming away from the radio. He was three-quarters in profile to her, and she could see a strange twist at the corner of his mouth, almost as if he were smiling. Her head felt oddly light, and her legs weak, and she held on to the tiled edge of the sink with all her strength. Her mind was a whirling jumble of disconnected and yet dreadfully relevant phrases which came partly from what she had just heard and partly from memory of Zakka's own words.

Triple slaying — You wouldn't believe it, what I been through . . . Shot to death — I told 'em, didn't I, time an' time I told 'em! . . . Triple slaying — How a fella's gotta handle people — stop 'em walkin' all over him! . . . Eight-year-old-niece — I couldn't help it! How could I help it!

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Eight-year-old-niece — Eight-year-old-niece — eight-year-old —

He spoke suddenly, and her heart stopped for a beat. He was looking full at her now. He jerked his head toward the radio and said, "Maybe I'd of told you, maybe I wouldn't. But now you know . . ."

Her head still felt light, but her sight seemed oddly sharpened. She could see his face clearly, deeply, as if she were looking at a photograph through a stereoscope. It looked different — older, somehow. The eyes had that queer sheen on them again, but they were steady on hers. And his whole face seemed older, firmer.

She didn't say anything. Her throat was too full of fear, and her lips were too dry. He looked at her intently, the thick black brows bunching together over the eyes that looked like any eyes but a lost dog's.

"Whatsammatter?" he said. "Lost your tongue?"

She said something before she knew she'd said it. She said, "I think it's because I'm frightened."

She went on seeing his face. Her gaze was fixed on it, immovably. And even before he spoke she realized suddenly why it looked different.

He was feeling important. Since the broadcast. He felt like Somebody.

"You don't want to be scared," he said. "It's like I told you, do what I say an' you'll be all right." He pointed at the coffeepot. "How's for the java?" he said.

Mrs. Tyrrel pushed herself away from the sink. Now her head didn't feel light, it felt numb and heavy. But her legs held her up. She lifted the coffeepot and stood away from the sink and crossed to the table and set the pot in front of him. She turned back and collected cup and saucer, spoon and sugar bowl and took them to the table too.

She went back to the sink and leaned against it once more. The smooth feel of the tile under her fingers was faintly comforting. She found herself looking at Zakka again, as he filled the cup and put three lumps of sugar into it and at last sipped noisily.

He said, "A-ah!" and looked at her — and actually smiled. "Mighty nice cuppa coffee!" he said, and sipped again.

He said, "Now remember — all you gotta do is like I say. But I'm warnin' you right now, that's gotta go for the kid too!" He was a minatory Prelate. "I'm figurin' this canyon'll be blocked for maybe two-three more days —"

He was now a general planning his campaign — until the interruption checked him; the sound, coming through the open rear-door of the kitchen, of another door opening somewhere along the passage.

And then he sat bolt upright, like a marionette whose strings have been pulled too roughly. Mrs. Tyrrel's heart thudded chokingly in her throat and a black-and-fire-flecked mist swam in front of her eyes.

"Mother!" came a sleepy call. "Mother, I want my orange juice . . ."

Through the mist Mrs. Tyrrel saw

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Zakka relax in his chair, but also saw something in his hand, something blue-glinting and bulky which he was sliding into the side pocket of Richard's jacket, and not back into the hip pocket he'd pulled it from . . .

Eight-year-old — All of a sudden you can't take it any more! . . .

She heard her own voice in an answering call — a voice which sounded almost natural. "Yes, darling," said her voice. "Get back to bed and I'll bring it . . ."

She heard Wendy's door close again and, thankful for this one drop of mercy, forced herself to look at Zakka.

He was still sitting down, and still relaxed. But he was scowling and shaking his head, the gray light from the window emphasizing the contrast between the yellow pallor of his cheeks and the blackness of the beard stubble.

"*Kids!*" he said, and shook his head again.

Mrs. Tyrrel said, "She only wants her juice. If I take it to her, she'll be quiet." The mist was gone now, and she watched him and waited in an agony of terror.

There was a pause — a second, an hour, a year. And then he said, "*O*-kay . . ." and Mrs. Tyrrel drew a breath again — a breath which hurt her chest. She went stiffly across to the refrigerator and pulled open its white door and found the big, flagon-shaped carafe of molded glass in which she always kept the orange juice. There was very little in it, but it felt extraordinarily heavy, and she had to make a conscious effort to lift it out. She set it on the sideboard under the china cupboard, and reached up for one of Wendy's favorite glasses. She took the stopper out of the carafe — and it nearly slipped from her fingers. She filled the glass, and left the carafe where it was, empty and stopperless. She turned around, holding the glass in both hands to keep it steady. She said, "Shall I take it along now?" — and stopped breathing again as Zakka pushed back his chair and got to his feet.

He said, "I'll come with you," and she hesitated for an instant, then started out of the kitchen and down the passage.

He was so close behind her she could hear him breathing. Once she even felt his foot brush against her heel . . .

She came to Wendy's door, shifted the glass to one hand, and lifted the latch with the other.

Wendy was sitting up in bed. Her hair was rumpled and her eyes were sleepy and she was smiling the big fat smile which always wrung Mrs. Tyrrel's heart and now was almost unbearable. Especially when, as the sleepy eyes looked over her mother's shoulder and widened in puzzled distress, it was slowly wiped away from the small face.

Now Mrs. Tyrrel smiled, wondering what her smile looked like even as she went quickly into the room. Knowing that Zakka was still close

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behind her, she bent over the bed and put the glass down on the little table with the White Rabbit lamp on it, and went through every phase of the good-morning ritual, starting with "Hello, Sleepyhead," and ending with Richard's special, "Now Infant, embrace your Progenitor!"

But it didn't work. Nothing worked — even the extra tightness of the final hug. All the time, Wendy's eyes were watching Zakka — as he crossed from the door, as he passed the bed, as he went to the window, as he peered out and down at the sheer drop of fifteen feet and the water and slime below it, as, satisfied with what he'd seen, he went back to the door again, once more behind Mrs. Tyrrel's back . . .

Mrs. Tyrrel tried to straighten up, but her daughter's arms clamped around her neck with the surprising strength of the young, and her daughter's voice rang out in a roaring whisper, "Mother, when's the man going away, Mother?"

Mrs. Tyrrel started to say something — anything — to try and cover the whisper. But it was no use. He'd heard it, and before she'd got out a couple of words he was there beside them, looking down at Wendy.

He said, "Listen, kid, you keep that trap shut!" And Mrs. Tyrrel, who couldn't see his face, knew what was in it as she watched her daughter's and saw the color fade from the cheeks and the big eyes widen in a sort of stricken, fearful disbelief.

"Understand?" came Zakka's voice again, and Wendy nodded jerkily, her grip loosening around Mrs. Tyrrel's neck as she lay back on her pillows . . .

And that was all — except that Mrs. Tyrrel had become conscious of the forming, somewhere inside her, of a white-hot core which was spreading warmth and certainty all through her. She kissed Wendy and said, "That's right, darling, try and go to sleep again," and stood straight and walked to the door and out into the passage.

Zakka came out of the room on her heels, and she closed the door and started back toward the kitchen. She avoided looking at him, because she was afraid he might see something different in her, and that wouldn't do — that wouldn't do at all!

He was right at her shoulder. He was saying something. "See how she clammed up when I told her!" There was a rich smugness of self-satisfaction in his voice. "It's what y'feel *inside* that does it — not what y'say!"

She didn't answer. She didn't speak until they were back in the kitchen, and then she said, "Sit down, and I'll give you some fresh coffee." She tried to make her voice sound the way she'd felt before, when she was afraid.

She must have been successful, because he didn't seem to notice anything different. He sat at the table again, and lit a cigarette while she took his cup away and emptied it and turned on the burner under the coffeepot. Her hands were steady again —

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not from the numbness of fear, but because of the change in her; because of the spreading heat and the increasing sureness it was bringing.

She knew what she was going to do — every movement of it. She forced herself not to look at the sideboard. She refilled the cup and put it down in front of him. She said, "Do you want breakfast now or would you rather wait?"

She had to look at him as she spoke, because he might grow suspicious if she didn't. So she looked at him, willing her face to be blank. He was smiling at her with Jovian approval, the gums showing pinkly gray against the whiteness of his teeth.

"Attagirl!" he said. "You're actin' *right* . . ." He pondered. "Guess we'll leave the chow for a while." He went on smiling. " 'Nother cuppa java, an' maybe a shot, an' I'll be ready. . . ."

She said, "Just as you like," and then, "I hope there's enough bacon."

She was very casual; she had to keep him relaxed so that she could get behind him without being watched. She moved slowly across toward the refrigerator.

She opened it, and her heart leaped as she saw that he hadn't turned to look at her! His back was to her, squarely. He had his cup in both hands and was sipping from it, concentrated momentarily on the taste and smell of the coffee . . .

She rattled things about inside the refrigerator. She muttered, as if to herself, but just loud enough to be heard, "Now, *where* did I put it?" — and, another glance having shown her that he hadn't altered his position by an inch, whipped silently back around the open door of the refrigerator and reached for the big carafe which still stood on the sideboard.

Its long narrow neck was smooth against her fingers. It didn't seem heavy any more; it seemed right . . .

Something seemed to have happened to Time . . . It was moving so slowly that it hardly seemed to move at all. She felt like a figure enmeshed in the frustrations of a slow-motion camera . . .

She tried to measure with her eye the distance to Zakka's back . . . Two steps — two short steps . . . With the heavy bottle raised above her shoulder as she stepped . . . The flick of an instant — the hundredth part of a second . . . Even if he moved, it wouldn't matter . . . And then the smashing crunch as the glass beat down on his head . . . She could feel a foretaste of the impact run up her arm and into her shoulder . . .

She raised the thing — and a qualm, a flickering doubt, brushed across her mind . . . To be instantly replaced by a memory of the stricken look in her daughter's eyes . . .

Eight-year-old — It's what y'feel inside that does it!

She drew in her breath noiselessly, filling her lungs. A bare second had passed since she had gripped the weapon.

She started forward —

And then he turned around — be-

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fore her muscles had time to obey her brain.

His chair clattered to the floor as he jumped to his feet. His right hand flickered toward the sagging side-pocket of Richard's jacket, then abandoned the movement and shot out and grasped her wrist. He twisted — and a sharp searing pang shot up her arm and the carafe fell to the floor with a dead and thumping sound. It didn't break, but rolled a little and lay on its side near the stove, the dregs of orange juice leaking out to make a yellow stain on the floor.

He said, "So you're the same as the rest!" — and twisted at her wrist again.

Her body jerked spasmodically, but now she didn't feel any pain. The white-hot core inside her had been a delusion, a trap. A trap to break down all defense and — far worse — to remove all chance of even temporarily lulling suspicion again.

She was finished. There was nothing left — nothing she could do.

He dropped her wrist. She staggered back against the sideboard, and would have fallen if the edge of it hadn't come hard against her back. She flung her hands out behind her and gripped the wood. She stared up at Zakka, her mouth dry, her throat closing.

There was no sound except the drumming of the rain and the harsh rasp of Zakka's breathing.

But then there was a sound — a sound from outside — a sort of rushing, sliding rumble. And Mrs. Tyrrel saw two great lumps of sodden earth roll down the hillside. They bounded out of her sight beneath the window-sill, and then, bursting on the narrow path between the hill and the back of the house, sprayed up a muddy shower which splashed against the panes . . .

Zakka whirled around. His hand went to the sagging pocket, and for the first time he pulled the gun into full sight — a squat, heavy automatic. He said, "*Whassat?*" and stared at the window and backed up until he stood beside her. He looked at her once, with a darting movement of his head, then shot out his left hand and gripped her by the arm.

She found she could speak. She said, "It's — it's only the flood. Some dirt broke away . . ."

Then, on top of her words, came the voice. It was a male voice, fat and cheerful, and it came from above the windows — from the top of the sheer cut in the hillside, where it blended back into the steep wooded slopes.

"Be-low there!" it called. "It's your Morden Farms milkman!" Another lump of earth slid down and burst on the path. "I'm coming down!"

Zakka's fingers closed on Mrs. Tyrrel's arm like the jaws of a vise. They twisted and her whole body swung around until she was facing him. She didn't feel anything: she thought she wouldn't be able to feel anything ever any more. For one flashing instant, as she'd heard the voice from outside, she'd felt a warm wave of hope rushing all through her, but in the next

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flash she'd realized exactly what would happen.

And it did happen. But first, the gun was held under her eyes — so close that she could feel on her cheek a faint warmth from the metal; and then Zakka's voice came in her ear, in a whisper which seemed to go right through her head like a sharp blade:

"Do like I say! Or you'll get it, an' he'll get it —" a long pause — "*An' you know who else!*"

Outside the window more earth came down — this time a shower of little clods. And then, like some awful travesty of the Fairy Queen descending from the wings in a Children's Play, a pair of legs, huge with heavy rubber hip-boots . . .

Zakka tightened the grip on her arm still more. He pulled her to one side and thrust the pistol back into the pocket of Richard's jacket, leaving his hand in there gripping it. Outside the window, the booted legs became a slicker-clad torso, and then a man, with a rope around his waist, a metal tray of racked bottles and packages in his hand, and his head topped by an outsize sou'-wester. He peered through the window, obviously saw nothing; then, unfastening the rope, he turned and went along the path toward the back door . . .

A whisper rustled in Mrs. Tyrrel's ear: "*Will he come in?*"

The muscles in her neck worked her head in a nod, and out of her mouth came the words, pitched as low as his, "*Back porch.*"

He let go of her arm, stepped behind her, and thrust the hand in his pocket forward until the muzzle of the gun was jammed hard into the small of her back. She flinched, and his whisper came in her ear again:

"Act natural! An' I'm your brother — from Detroit! Get it?"

The door of the back porch opened noisily. Zakka pushed her forward, and automatically she walked ahead of him across the kitchen. The milkman was framed in the outer doorway — a square, shapeless, solid figure, water splashing from his oilskins. He set the tray of bottles down on the floor, pulled the door closed, and called, "Mi-ilkman! Anybody up?"

He straightened and saw them approaching. "Morning, Mrs. Tyrrel," he said, and mopped with a handkerchief at his beefy face. "Great weather for ducks!" He chuckled richly.

Mrs. Tyrrel stopped in the kitchen doorway; she had felt a pressure against her back. She leaned against the jamb — and Zakka stopped where he was, his right shoulder and side behind her left, his left arm outstretched so that its hand rested casually against the other jamb. She realized the whole picture might look perfectly natural. She twisted her face into something like a smile and said, "Good morning . . . Isn't this awful? How in the world did you get into the canyon?"

Her voice sounded odd, she thought, and she wondered whether the man would notice anything. She prayed that he would — and then, even more fervently, that he wouldn't . . .

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But he was talking, in his fat stupid cheerful voice, and she had to listen. She might have to answer . . .

". . . a big deal!" the milkman was saying. "What we feel at Morden Farms is 'The Milk's Got to Get Through'!" He chuckled again. "So the Head Office, they hire a couple dozen tractors — and we start out at the crack of dawn like . . ." He finished mopping his face and tucked the vast handkerchief away. His eyes were bright blue, and small in the red moon-face, and abysmally stupid. He said:

"So *my* tractor — well, we started off around 4:30, and we worked up the hill from the Valley side — and here we are!" A little cascade of water dripped from the sou'-wester and he pushed it to the back of his head. He said, "Don't mind telling you, Mrs. Tyrrel, your place is the toughest we had to get to yet. We nearly passed it up — but then I thought of the little girl, and you and Mr. Tyrrel — and I figured I wasn't going to let you down —"

The pressure — very slight but unmistakable — came in Mrs. Tyrrel's back again. She made another smile and said, "Mr. Tyrrel's still in the East, but luckily my brother's out here from Detroit and he's been staying with me . . ."

It seemed to come out all right, and she even managed an introductory nod toward Zakka behind her.

"Swell!" said the milkman. He looked at Zakka and grinned. "Hope this ain't your first visit — you might get the wrong ideas about the Golden State, Mr. Uh —"

Zakka said, "Oh, I dunno — sorta fun — adventurous . . ." and the milkman said, "Maybe you got something there!" and then looked at Mrs. Tyrrel again and became a businessman.

"Well, Mrs. Tyrrel," he said, "what'll it be? The usual — or you want to sort of stock up like?"

She didn't know how much more she could stand. Her head felt light, as if she were going to faint. She said, "Oh, I don't know — what do you think?" Her voice sounded odd, even in her own ears, but the milkman noticed nothing. To be appealed to like this was obviously meat and drink to him. He chuckled again, rubbed his hands, and said, "We-ell, I'll tell you: what *I* think, you should just take the usual and then double it."

He bent over the metal basket and began to take out cartons and bottles, setting each one down on the shelf beside the washing machine, and announcing each item as he did so.

He finished. He straightened and pulled the sou'-wester down over his forehead and picked up his basket . . .

He was going — and Mrs. Tyrrel didn't want him to go.

He said, "Well, that's the lot, I guess," and turned his back and reached for the handle of the outer door.

He was going — and Mrs. Tyrrel couldn't bear to let him go. She was

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on the point of saying something — anything — to keep him here, when she felt the pressure in her back again and bit off the thought.

He started out — and all hope went with him . . .

But then he turned and stepped back over the threshold, leaving the door open and the thin drops of rain slanting in. He said, "Hey, Mrs. Tyrrel, I wonder would the little girl like this?" He set his basket on the floor and pulled from it a strangely shaped, varicolored carton. "New chocolate drink Morden's putting out," he said, and opened the carton with a huge thumb and stepped closer to her —

And jerked a stream of the contents over her shoulder, straight into Zakka's eyes. At the same time — in the same movement almost — he swept Mrs. Tyrrel aside with an arm like an oak bough, and smashed a hamlike fist into Zakka's splattered face.

Mrs. Tyrrel heard the blow — a sound like beef smacking down on a wood-block — as she nearly fell but was saved by the smooth metal bulk of the washer — closed her eyes at the *spatt* of another blow — opened them again to see Zakka, his face a bloody mask, crumple to the floor and lie there, half in and half out of the kitchen door, an unmoving, unconscious heap . . .

The milkman, picking up the gun and dropping it into a pocket in his slicker, glowered down at the heap. "A-aah, the punk!" he growled. "What's he think? — that I don't know a gun in a pocket when I see it!" Stirred by combat to memory of his Marine Corps days, he seemed momentarily to have forgotten Mrs. Tyrrel.

But when he turned and saw her leaning weakly against the wall, he was all solicitude. He put one great arm around her and lifted her to the stool by the door, and then stood clumsily patting her shoulder while she clutched at him and tried to tell him everything all at once.

He didn't speak until she'd got to the part about hearing the police description over the radio, but then he said, "Holy smoke! Is he *that* guy?"

Mrs. Tyrrel hadn't known she was crying until this made her want to laugh. She said, "I — I think I'm getting hysterical," and then stopped dead, jumping to her feet as she heard a door open softly along the passage and a small voice call tentatively:

"Mother, Mo-ther! Where are you?"

"*Hey!*" said the milkman in a hoarse whisper. "Mustn't let her see *this!*" He straddled Zakka's limp body and lifted it like a half-empty sack and threw it into the kitchen and went in after it and kicked the door shut behind him.

There was a running patter of feet along the passage, and just as Mrs. Tyrrel got to her feet and started toward the sound, the figure of her daughter erupted into sight.

"Oh, Mother!" said her daughter. "Is the man gone, Mother?"

"Yes, darling," said Mrs. Tyrrel, "he's gone."

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Another of Hugh Pentecost's fine detective novelettes revealing once again his particular specialty — the unusual background. This time you will follow the winter tournament trail of the golf pros — one of the toughest and most cut-throat competitions in the sports world — the sport of such "kings" as Bobby Jones, Gene Sarazen, Walter Hagen, and that present-day master, Ben Hogan . . . Hugh Pentecost knows his golf from first-hand knowledge and experience. If we remember correctly, Mr. Pentecost once boasted a metropolitan handicap of a mere 2 — which is he-man, big-league golf!

MURDER PLAYS THROUGH

by HUGH PENTECOST

THEY CAME ALONG THE BUMPY tractor road, ten, twelve cars, headlights boring into the dark summer evening. As they got close to the eighth green at the far end of the golf course they broke out of single file — fanned out and approached the green in an irregular semicircle. People spilled out of the cars; men in white dinner jackets, women in evening clothes. They converged on the sand trap to the right of the green, voices excited. Then the voices died down, as if controlled by some invisible orchestra leader.

The picture might have been planned by a Hollywood director. A dozen sets of headlights focused on the sand trap; a figure in the trap, spreadeagled in the sand. The figure was dressed in blue slacks, a coral-pink shirt, and black-and-white golf shoes. Beside the figure lay a golf club — a sand wedge. The rustproof club head was spattered with blood.

Two men had been crouching near the edge of the trap before the cars arrived. One of them was an old, gray-haired man dressed in a shabby, nondescript tweed suit. He stared steadily at the figure in the trap, and tears ran down from his pale blue eyes and streaked his leathery cheeks. The other man was young, dressed in flannel slacks and a sports jacket. His face was white, muscles knotted along the line of his square jaw. He was swearing softly but audibly. He seemed unaware of the arrival of the cars, or that he could be heard by the people who were suddenly grouped behind him.

One of the dinner-jacketed men stepped forward and put his hand on the old man's shoulder. "There's nothing you can do here, Bob," he said.

The old man didn't move a muscle. "He was like my son," he said in a dull voice.

The younger man stood up and

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faced the group. "Have you got to stand there gaping like a bunch of ghouls?" he shouted.

The man in the dinner jacket turned. "Easy, Johnny," he said.

"Can't you see he's been killed? Why haven't you called the cops?"

"We've called them, Johnny. You and Bob didn't touch anything, did you?"

"Do you have to be a doctor to see it wouldn't be any use?"

A girl detached herself from the crowd. She was small and delicately made. She had a pert, upturned nose with freckles across its bridge. She wore a strapless evening gown, and a short velvet jacket had been hastily draped over her shoulders. She reached out toward the boy called Johnny.

"Come away, Johnny," she said.

He shouted at her, "Let me alone!" Then he stumbled into the darkness, out of the wide circle of light thrown by the cars. He'd only taken half a dozen steps when they could all hear the sobbing that suddenly wracked him.

The girl hesitated, and then started after him. Someone in the crowd called to her: "Midge!"

She paid no attention.

"Your name is Johnny Yale?"

The young man stared across the table at the D.A.'s men with red-rimmed eyes. "Why aren't you out there doing something instead of grilling us? We didn't kill him!"

The old man sat beside him. Not a muscle of his face moved, but every once in a while a tear ran out of the corners of his eyes, wetting the gray stubble on his cheeks and chin.

"You two found him. It's my job to get your story."

"We went to find him," Johnny Yale said "They wanted him for the Calcutta pool. He was practicing —"

"In the dark?"

"His car was there. The headlights —"

"Why would he be practicing after dark?"

The old man answered, "He flubbed a shot there this afternoon. It was like him. He'd play it over a hundred times till he had it licked."

"He was one of the topnotchers, wasn't he?"

Johnny Yale looked at the D.A.'s men as if he couldn't believe what he'd heard. "You're asking me?"

"Well, wasn't he?"

Johnny drew a deep breath. "Duke Merritt was the greatest — the greatest golfer and the greatest guy — You want to know about Duke Merritt?"

"It's my job."

He shook his head slowly. "Where have you been all your life, mister?"

Johnny Yale's statement to the D.A.'s men was factual and bare. He was a golf professional. He had met Duke Merritt about six months ago in Tucson, Arizona. He was on the winter tournament trail with the traveling pros, playing for the rich purses set up by the local chambers of

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commerce and businessmen's groups through the Southwest, Florida, and up the East Coast. Duke Merritt had befriended him, an unknown and inexperienced competitor. They had arrived at Mountain Grove, a new stop in the pro circuit, to play in the special tournament set up by the owner of the new resort. A 9:30 that night —

Factual and bare. It wasn't really the story at all. The real story was about a lonely, defeated kid, looking to make a living out of the only thing he knew how to do moderately well, and failing miserably because the competition was too hot, too cut-throat, too experienced.

Johnny knew now that his head had been in the clouds when he set out from California in a 1946 jalopy with less than $200 in his pocket, half a dozen clean shirts, and a set of golf clubs, to pit himself against the top-notchers, against professionals like Duke Merritt and Hal Hamner. These men had resources; connections with sporting-goods manufacturers, clothing manufacturers, salaries from golf clubs who paid them as playing pros, exhibition dates between tournaments that brought them money.

If they didn't collect any of the tournament money one week, they could still eat, still move on to the next town, still have their names in the sports pages of the nation's newspapers. Nobody had ever heard of Johnny Yale, ex-caddie, jobless pro. Nobody had ever heard of him, and they cared less what happened to him.

The winter trek was scarcely under way — had only reached Tucson — when Johnny knew that his hope of paying his way by competing with the big shots was about to go up in smoke. The car needed repairs. He was sleeping in it at night to avoid motel bills. The tires were wearing thin. He didn't even have the cash left to buy new golf balls. He was finished, unless he could take some part of the prize money being offered in Tucson. And at this critical moment his game had gone sour.

That morning in Tucson, standing on a tee in the practice lot, trying to discover why his drives had lost distance and were constantly fading off to the right, Johnny knew the meaning of despair.

He had hit a dozen balls off the tee, all with the disastrous fade. He stood, his eyes focused on the ground, trying to check with himself. Slow back — straight left arm — wrists cocked at the top of the swing — start the club down with the left hand, wrists still cocked — at hip level, get the right hand into it and hit through and out.

"You're closing the club face too fast," a voice said behind him.

Johnny turned. The figure standing there, smiling at him, was familiar and unforgettable. Duke Merritt was one of the top-shots, a brilliant golfer, but perhaps more famous for his showmanship than anything else. The Duke had connections with a big national clothing manufacturer. Part of his racket was to wear clothes — gaudy and eye-catching. That morn-

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ing he had on bright orange slacks, a green sports shirt, and a green plaid cap. He stood out like a Roman candle against the night sky. He had a winning, humorous smile.

"You're fighting that slice by trying to get your wrist action in too fast," he said to Johnny. "Result is you're closing the club face too soon and cutting across the ball. Try keeping the club face open. Go ahead."

Johnny teed up a ball and hit it. It went straight as a string down the center of the practice lot. Johnny turned to the Duke, beads of relieved perspiration on his forehead.

"I've been trying to figure that out for the last three days," Johnny said. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't thank me," the Duke said. "It was Bob, here, who spotted it."

For the first time Johnny took his dazzled eyes off the resplendent Duke to look at the old, gray-haired man who carried the Duke's heavy golf bag.

"Bob's forgotten more about this game than most of us'll ever learn," the Duke said. "You swing the club like an ex-caddie." Johnny nodded. "That's where I started," the Duke said. "Bob Christie, here, was the pro at that club, and taught me what little I know. Now he's my boy — travels with me all over the country. You're Johnny Yale, aren't you?"

"Yes." Johnny was flattered that the Duke knew his name.

"Good luck," the Duke said. "Got to work a few kinks out of my long irons." And he and the old man moved on down to the other end of the practice lot.

Johnny's driving that day was improved, but the pressure on him, the need to do well if he was to eat, was too great. Putts that should have dropped didn't. Good shots wound up in bad lies. At the end of the first day he was so far out of the money that he knew he was through at Tucson, through with the tournament trail. He had failed, so there was no reason to hang around.

He was in the parking lot at the club, packing his few belongings in the jalopy, when old Bob Christie came around from the trunk of Duke Merritt's custom-built car with the silver body.

"How did it go, laddie?"

"Bad," Johnny said, trying to smile. "This was it. The boat sank. I'm swimming for shore. I was crazy to think I could play in this league."

"You've got a good, solid game, laddie," old Bob said. "The trouble is in your head. Tournament jitters."

"And what isn't in my pocket," Johnny said.

"Nobody wins at first," Bob said.

"I should have known that," Johnny said, "and waited till I had more to go on."

"How about a cup of coffee at the refreshment stand?" old Bob asked.

"I've got to go," Johnny said.

"There's no virtue in being overproud, laddie." A gnarled old hand closed on Johnny's arm. "And don't ever say you never heard of a Scot buying!"

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They wandered across toward a tent that had been set up near the clubhouse to serve coffee, sandwiches, and other food. The old man talked casually about earlier days, about Walter Hagen, and the immortal Bob Jones, and Gene Sarazen, and his fellow Scots like MacDonald Smith and Long Jim Barnes. "They all had it rough to start with, laddie. Why, I can even remember when we weren't allowed to walk in the front door of a clubhouse. Stick it out a bit longer, laddie. It's a grand game. Don't let it beat you."

"Broke is broke," Johnny said.

They went toward the counter in the tent for coffee. Old Bob led the way, and it happened to be past a table where Duke Merritt sat with a man Johnny recognized as a sports writer.

The Duke saw him and waved pleasantly. "How did it go?"

Johnny turned a thumb down in a gesture of defeat.

"The boy's thinking of leaving us," Bob said.

"Broke?" the Duke asked.

"Yes."

"Something might be done about it," the Duke said, his eyes faintly narrowed.

"I might have my head examined for thinking I could make it in the first place," Johnny said.

"This is the kid I told you about — sleeping in the back of his car," the Duke said to the sports writer. "The Horatio Alger kid. You better stick around, Johnny. We can handle the slack for you for a while. The lucky ones should take care of the unlucky." He smiled at the writer. "Never know when you'll need it to come your way."

"It's a nice idea," Johnny said, "but of course it doesn't make sense."

"No back talk," the Duke said. "Take care of him, Bob."

That was how it happened. Bob Christie insisted on his taking the loan of a few bucks. The next day the Tucson paper carried a story about the "Horatio Alger kid" who was Duke Merritt's protégé. It was a story about the Duke, really, and the kind of guy he was, but people began to know who Johnny was. Johnny became part of the Duke's entourage. He didn't start to win anything at once, but the pressure eased a little. The Duke wouldn't talk money. Old Bob kept a careful account and some day Johnny could pay it back.

There was nothing Johnny wouldn't do for the Duke and old Bob. There was the day when old Bob, who always looked a little seedy, sidled up to him with an anxious frown on his face.

"I don't like to go out on the clubhouse lawn, Johnny, looking the way I do. Would you tell the Duke I need to see him about something important? He's over there talking to Mrs. Hamner."

Sue Hamner was one of the glamor items on the winter trail. It was no secret she'd been a beauty-contest winner some years back and got herself a Hollywood contract. She'd made two or three pictures, and then,

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to everyone's surprise, she'd married Hal Hamner and given up her career. Sue was bright and vivacious. Hal was a tall, dark, handsome fellow with huge hands and wrists. He could hit a golf ball farther than any man alive. He was a silent, dogged competitor. The surprise about the marriage lay in the fact that Hal was an uneducated boy out of the Tennessee hills. He had no conversational talents and strictly no sense of humor. Sue must have fallen for his tall good looks. Beyond that he was without charm, as far as anyone could see — sullen, with a smoldering temper.

So Johnny walked over to the bright-colored beach umbrella under which Sue Hamner and the Duke were sitting. They were talking earnestly, so Johnny hesitated until Sue looked up and saw him.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Johnny said.

"Scram," the Duke said, grinning as usual.

"It's Bob Christie," Johnny said. "He says it's important to talk to you, Duke."

The Duke looked at Johnny with narrowed eyes. "Did Bob really send you?"

Johnny felt himself flushing. "Of course he sent me," he said stiffly.

The Duke stood up. "If this is some kind of a gag —" He walked away.

Johnny couldn't make a graceful exit. "I'm awfully sorry to have interrupted," he said to Sue.

"Don't be silly." She reached up and pushed her golden hair back from her cheek with bright lacquered fingers. "You're Johnny Yale, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Going pretty rough?"

Johnny gave her a crooked grin. "It isn't all ice cream and cake. At least, it isn't for the guys in my class."

"Hal says you have a good, sound game."

"Say, from him that's something."

"Keep plugging," she said.

"Thanks," Johnny said, and turned away.

"Johnny?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"You need some leather patches on the sleeves of that sports coat," she said.

Johnny flushed. "I know."

"If you'll give it to me some day when you're out playing I'll be glad to fix it for you. I've got some old pieces of leather I bought for Hal."

A shadow fell across Sue Hamner's face. Johnny looked up, and saw her husband standing there.

"You want something, Yale?" Hal asked, in his soft, sullen voice.

"We were just chatting, Hal," Sue said quickly.

Hal Hamner turned his head slowly as if he was looking for someone else. "Okay, Yale. Run along. I want to talk to my wife."

When he had a chance Johnny spoke to Bob about it. "You sent me out there to get the Duke because you knew Hamner was going to show up, didn't you?" he said.

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The old man smiled faintly. "So you saw through it, did you, laddie?"

"The way the Duke acted —"

The old man took his pipe out of his pocket and began scraping at the bowl with his penknife. "This is a strange life, lad. We never settle anywhere very long. The Duke is an attractive man, laddie, and a fine man. But he likes the ladies — likes them and leaves them. Like a sailor, he has them in every port."

"But Mrs. Hamner is different."

Bob nodded. "She's having a bad time with that man of hers. He's crazy jealous of her. He's rough with her."

Johnny remembered thinking he'd noticed a bruise on Sue Hamner's cheek one day, despite careful make-up.

"The Duke feels sorry for her," Bob said. "That's why he pays attention to her. But it could make it worse for her. I've tried to tell him. There can be trouble there if Hamner starts something with him."

Johnny was beginning to pick up a dollar here and there. His game had steadied. He was still worried about the amount that was piling up in old Bob's little black notebook, but neither Bob nor the Duke would discuss it.

"One good win, laddie, and you'll pay it back in a lump," Bob said.

It was when they reached Pinehurst, on the way north, that Midge Roper appeared on the scene. Johnny had never known a girl quite like her. She was always laughing, always gay — but somehow her gaiety seemed a little forced to him.

Old Bob explained it in part: "Sorrow can make people live in extremes, laddie. The girl is trying to forget her brother."

Ed Roper, Midge's brother, had been headline news a year ago. A great basketball star on the West Coast, Roper had been disclosed as having accepted a bribe to throw a championship game. Just before the District Attorney was ready to arrest the boy, Ed Roper had jumped from the window of his hotel room. Midge was living it down, head proud and high.

Almost at once it became apparent that she'd taken a terrific header for Duke Merritt. He seemed to go for her, too. They laughed at the same jokes, saw things in the same humorous way. She was nice to Johnny the way she might have been nice to the boy next door.

But she was mad for the Duke. Johnny tried to keep his eyes, his heart, and his mind shut. Midge Roper was the kind of girl he could have dreamed about.

Johnny had a feeling Midge could be hurt if she fell too hard for the Duke. He was glad they'd be moving on from Pinehurst in a few days. That would end it. But when the time came to head north again, Midge changed her vacation plans and followed them in her own car to the next tournament. After that they saw her at most of the tournaments. She finally came to Mountain Grove with them.

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This tournament was a big one, and it offered Johnny a real chance. A man named Victor Sayles was promoting and managing a new resort which had everything: magnificent golf, swimming, horses, winter sports in season. For the grand opening Sayles had put up a $15,000 purse for the traveling pros, with a slight difference. All the winter tournaments were medal-play events — you played against the field, your total score counting. The tournament at Mountain Grove was to be a match-play event — man to man. There would be sixteen qualifiers, each qualifier to collect $500. The remaining $7,000 would be divided, 50 per cent to the winner, 30 per cent to the runner-up, and 10 per cent to each of the losing semi-finalists. Johnny figured he had a good chance to qualify. The $500 would at least get him off the hook with the Duke, and at match play he'd have a fair chance against any of the boys. You could have a bad hole at match play and it only cost you the one hole; at medal, it would ruin your whole round.

Johnny got his first glimpse of Victor Sayles the afternoon they arrived. He was in his early forties, hair beginning to gray at the temples, expensively dressed, and with a pleasant manner. Johnny had helped carry the Duke's collection of luggage into the lobby. He had put down the bags at the front door, and he noticed Sue Hamner crossing the lobby towards the desk.

Sayles saw her and made a quick move in her direction. "Sue!" he said.

To Johnny's surprise, Sue made an abrupt silencing gesture. Then Hamner came across the lobby. He introduced himself to Sayles and then turned to Sue: "And this is my wife, Mr. Sayles."

Sayles's face was deadpan. He bowed.

"How do you do?" Sue said, as though she'd never seen him before in her life.

Johnny wondered about it, but there was too much else on his mind for him to give it much thought at the time. It was just one of those things. He didn't even get to mention it to Bob.

This tournament was do or die for Johnny, and his first practice round on the course gave him hope. It was a long layout, with narrow fairways. If you sprayed your drives here you were in real trouble. Johnny wasn't as long off the tee as Hamner, or Ted McGrath or the Duke or a dozen others. But he was straight and true. The big boys were going to find trouble here with their long hits off the tee.

It was during that practice round that Sue Hamner finally kept her promise to sew the leather patches on Johnny's sports jacket. He gave it to her just before he was starting off the first tee. He was sitting on the bench at the tee waiting for his turn, and found himself next to Ted McGrath.

"You looking to get your ears pinned back?" McGrath asked.

"I don't get it," Johnny said.

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"Hal eats little boys like you alive," McGrath said.

"Why should he want to?"

"Take a gander," McGrath said, nodding toward the clubhouse porch.

Hamner was there, talking to Sue, and even at a distance Johnny could see Hal was burned about something.

"I should have thought," McGrath said, "that after traveling with this circus for a while you'd have got the gist of that soap opera, and done your own sewing!"

Johnny was disturbed about it, but he pushed it to the back of his mind during the practice round. This was his one chance to learn the course before tomorrow's qualifying.

It was about four hours later, when he had finished his round and taken his shower, that Johnny went around to the clubhouse porch to get his jacket. Sue Hamner was sitting there, looking small and tired. Hal was in the chair next to her, staring out at the green hills. Johnny's coat rested on a little side table between them.

Johnny hesitated. Then Sue saw him. She seemed to close her eyes for a moment, and then she looked at him again. He couldn't tell if she was trying to give him any sort of signal or not. He had to have his jacket. It was the only one he owned. Uncertainly he went to them. He stood in front of them waiting for Sue to speak. She didn't. He thought of just snatching the jacket and getting out.

Then Hal Hamner turned his head. "My wife has fixed your coat," he said.

"I'm terribly grateful," Johnny said.

"You know what happens where I come from to a fellow who messes around with another man's wife?" Hamner asked. His voice wasn't raised, but it had a carrying quality.

Johnny, suddenly scarlet, realized that other people on the porch had turned to look and listen. "I haven't been messing around with anyone," Johnny said. "Mrs. Hamner kindly offered to —"

"Mrs. Hamner seems to be a push-over for the Merritt clan," Hamner said, just a little louder.

"Hal, please!" Sue whispered.

"Mrs. Hamner is mad for anything connected with Merritt," Hamner said, even louder.

Johnny's mouth was dry inside. He felt a hot, throbbing anger, but he didn't know how to manage things without making them worse for Sue.

"I'll just say thanks and take my coat," Johnny said.

"You'll just stand there and listen," Hamner said. "Unfortunately, my wife does not know how to say 'no' to the Merritt clan, so I'll have to say it for her. Get this straight, Yale: If I ever see or hear of you so much as —"

"Something wrong here?" a quiet voice asked behind Johnny. It was Duke Merritt.

Hamner was out of his chair, as if he'd been jet-propelled. Johnny was scared, more by the suddenness of it than by any conscious fear of what was coming.

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"I warned you, Merritt —" Hamner said.

"And I'm warning you," the Duke said, undisturbed. "Nobody has any control over your private life, Hal, but we can control what you do about it in public."

Hamner lunged forward, but he never got to Duke Merritt. By that time half a dozen guys were close enough to interfere. But Johnny Yale was closest to Hamner, and he had never seen such murderous fury.

Johnny wanted to tell Sue Hamner how sorry he was he'd gotten her in trouble, but there was no way to do it without making things worse.

The next day was the big day. There were about a hundred entries for the qualifying round, and Johnny knew he had to be one of the low sixteen if he was to get out of his long winter's trouble. It was a clear, warm day, with little or no wind. It was ideal for scoring — ideal for everybody.

Johnny found himself in a qualifying threesome with two local pros he didn't know. That was a help, in a way. He could lock himself up in his own concentration. It was going to be a long, 36-hole grind, with Johnny's dream at stake at the end of the day.

He played steadily through the morning round, and at the luncheon break found himself, including ties, among the first 35 scores on the board. Some of them would get better in the afternoon, some worse. At best, he knew he was flirting with the very outside kind of chance.

He was a late starter in the afternoon, and knew he'd be one of the last finishers. That was a disadvantage, because when he came to the last three or four holes news was bound to come out onto the course as to just exactly what score would be needed to get in. That was the way it happened. As he walked off the seventeenth green someone approached his caddie, and a moment later the caddie reported to him.

"It'll take 140 to get in, Mr. Yale," he said. "There are a lot of ties at 141 and you'd have to play off."

The mathematics of it were simple. Johnny had scored a one over par 71 in the morning. He stood on the eighteenth tee now with a par 4 for 69. But that eighteenth was one of the strongest finishing holes Johnny had ever seen. The fairway stretched straight away, narrow, heavily trapped at about the distance a good drive would carry, the rough on either side made up of heavy wire-grass. If you stayed straight you still had the second shot to play. The green was elevated, partially blind. You could see the red flag on the top of the pin, but you couldn't see the green itself — only the hummocks marking the deep traps on either side.

Johnny tried to clear his mind of anything but a picture of the smooth, unhurried swing necessary to get off the all-important drive. They had to wait, a torturing five minutes, for the threesome ahead to get out of range. Johnny swung his driver a couple of times and finally stepped up to the

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ball. Slowly he drew the club head back, wrists cocked at the top of the swing. Slowly he started it down and then lashed out at the ball. He was so intent on keeping his head down that he didn't look up after his shot until he heard his caddie speak:

"A beaut, Mr. Yale. Perfect."

Far down the center on the green turf he saw the small white ball glistening in the sun. As he walked slowly out toward it he wished for old Bob's advice. Bold or careful was the problem on the next shot. On either side of the green were the white, sandy graves of a thousand hopes. In back of the green was a long, shallow trap. Too bold, and you were in it. Too careful, and you had a downhill pitch over a glass-smooth green, with only one putt left to make par.

Johnny took his two iron out of the bag, hesitated, and then exchanged it for the three. He hit the shot, firmly and crisply. It seemed to split the pin as it rose up over the hill.

He looked at his caddie. The boy moistened his lips.

"It could be just a little short, Mr. Yale."

It was just a little short — about fifteen yards. The pin was near the front edge of the green. If he pitched short, the heavy fringe of grass around the edge would stop his ball. If he played it boldly, he might slide dangerously far past the flag. He had to be on the putting surface. He had to play it boldly.

His hands were frighteningly unsteady as he clipped at the grass tops with his eight iron. This was it. He steadied over the ball and played the pitch. It lit just on the green. For a second he thought it would bite and hold, but it began to roll over the slippery surface — roll, and roll until it was a good twenty feet past the cup.

So finally he was faced with a twenty-foot, uphill putt. He had to make it to be sure of his money. If he missed and went down on the next one he'd still have a chance on a play-off. Common caution might have suggested making sure of the play-off and not going too boldly for the twenty-footer and sliding too far past again.

A crowd circled the green, watching him. Everyone knew he had this putt to be certain of a place in the main event. For a moment Johnny's concentration was almost fatally broken. He looked up, and saw Midge Roper in the front rank of the crowd. She was sitting on a portable stool, and her hands were clenched tightly at her sides.

Johnny knelt down behind his ball to study the line of the putt. The green broke slightly to the right, he thought. But he couldn't play it to drift in. It was uphill and the ball would die sharply when it lost momentum.

He got up and moved away — and there was old Bob Christie, his face impassive, standing on the fringe of the crowd.

"Straight at the back of the cup!" That's what the Duke would have said, out loud, to the gallery. Johnny

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thought. He would have broken his own tension and he'd have played for the works.

Johnny took one more look at the line and then faced his ball. The putter blade went smoothly back, smoothly through. Clunk! And a roar from the crowd! He'd made it.

Johnny thought his legs wouldn't carry him off the last green after he'd holed that decisive putt. Before he could get very far, arms were around his neck and Midge Roper planted a kiss squarely on his lips.

"That was the bravest darn' putt I ever saw, Johnny," she said. "I'm proud of you. The Duke'll be proud of you."

The bulk of the crowd had moved toward the forward edge of the green to watch the next threesome coming up. Only Bob remained where he'd been standing. Johnny and Midge went over to him.

The old man gave Johnny a dour look. "Why didn't you play for the sure tie?"

"Because I'd never have won in a play-off," Johnny said. "I'm so bushed I don't have one more golf shot left in my system."

"So long as you figured it," old Bob said. His face relaxed. "It was a real good putt, laddie. The boy becomes a man."

"How about the Duke?" Johnny asked.

"He made it," Bob said grimly.

Midge filled him in: The Duke had gotten into trouble in the big trap by the eighth green. He'd wasted two shots there and had to play his head off the rest of the way in to qualify.

The locker room was a mixture of gaiety and despair. Men sat in front of some of the lockers, weary and silent. Others were grouped at the round tables at the end of the room, laughing and talking.

The Duke was there, a glass in his hand. He'd had his shower and was freshly and magnificently dressed in pale-blue slacks and a coral-pink shirt. He saw Johnny and waved. Johnny could tell by his face he didn't want to ask.

"I made it," Johnny said. "By one stroke."

"Nice going," the Duke said. "You should have seen me. I plunked one in that trap by the eighth, and I had a near unplayable lie after that. You should have seen Bob's face. So I —"

Johnny was too tired to listen. He went to his locker and slowly got out of his clothes. He went to the shower room, pausing at the water cooler for a drink. In a mirror beside the cooler he glanced at his reflection. There were weary shadows under his eyes and lines of near exhaustion at the corners of his mouth. Also, there was a small red smear there. Midge! He felt a faint tingling sensation along his spine as he stepped under the steaming hot shower. She hadn't meant anything by it. But all the same, it had happened.

If Johnny'd had any choice he'd have gone off somewhere by himself

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for the evening. He couldn't afford the ten dollars for the magnificent buffet supper and unlimited drinks Victor Sayles was providing for players and guests at Mountain Grove. But all the qualifiers had been asked to stick around for the Calcutta Pool that was to be held after dinner.

A Calcutta Pool is a gambling device for those who had the real money. Each of the sixteen qualifiers would be auctioned off to the highest bidder, the money lumped in one big pool. Then the person who had bought in the eventual winner would collect half the pool, the one owning the runner-up 30 per cent, and those owning the losing semi-finalists 10 per cent each. Players like Hal Hamner and the Duke and Ted McGrath might eventually sell for as much as four or five thousand dollars. They said the total amount in the pool might amount to forty or fifty thousand.

Johnny got himself a sandwich in town and then came back to the hotel. Several hundred people were gathered in the ballroom, dancing to a small three-piece combination. Almost everyone had dressed for the occasion.

Johnny sat on the terrace by himself, outside the open French windows. He felt unaccountably sad, considering this had been a day of triumph for him — sad like a distant train whistle in the middle of the night; like a hot horn played in a deserted night spot in a strange city. Once he caught a glimpse through the open doors of Midge dancing with a handsome young guy in a white dinner jacket. It made his loneliness more acute.

Finally the moment he had dreaded came. There was a long roll on the drums and then a jovial voice took command:

"This is the moment you've all been waiting for, ladies and gentlemen. We'll now begin the auctioning for the Calcutta Pool. If you'll just gather around the platform here and unloosen the zippers on your change purses." Voices became quieter, feet shuffled on the dance floor. "We're going to do this in reverse," the auctioneer said. "We'll save the real plums till the last. So, we'll begin with the sixteenth qualifier, Johnny Yale. Johnny, where are you?"

Slowly Johnny got up and walked to one of the open doors. He felt shabby in his old slacks and his sports jacket with the patched leather sleeves. Somebody spotted him and pointed him out to the auctioneer, a fat man wearing a white dinner jacket with a red cummerbund around his middle and a red tie.

"Come on up here, Johnny, so the girls can have a look at you."

Johnny edged his way along the side of the room and forced himself to mount the steps to the platform.

"Hey, not bad, eh, girls?"

There was a small amount of laughter and a ripple of applause.

"Being a Princeton man myself I'd be inclined to sell a Yale short," the auctioneer said. "A joke, fellows. Meant to be a joke." More laughter,

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while Johnny shuffled his feet and waited. "You'd be a sucker to sell Johnny Yale short, though. He's one of the real dark horses of this event. They tell me he had a twenty-foot putt on the last green to win his place. He could have gone for a tie, but he didn't. He banged it in. That kind of a guy is going to be bad medicine in match play. . . . Well, what am I offered?"

No one made any sort of bid. Johnny felt the color mounting in his cheeks.

"Let's not stall around, ladies and gentlemen. What am I bid for Johnny Yale? Maybe Johnny won't mind my saying that he's a little hungrier than some of the big shots in this field. Look out for a hungry competitor, I always say. He's apt to eat you alive. All right, all right, let's get started. What am I bid?"

It seemed to Johnny the silence was deafening, and then a clear, small voice he'd have known anywhere broke in.

"One hundred dollars," Midge Roper said.

What a girl! She had seen his embarrassment and stepped into the breach.

"One fifty," a man's voice called out.

"— seventy-five," Midge said.

"Two hundred."

"— and fifty," Midge said sturdily.

"Three —"

The bidding between Midge and the man was brisk.

"Three fifty," Midge said.

"Four hundred."

The drawings for the next day were posted. These people knew what they were doing, Johnny realized. He was paired against Hal Hamner in the first round. The man bidding against Midge was a fellow Johnny knew would be bidding for Hal. Johnny would be a kind of insurance in case, by some miracle, he should eliminate Hal.

"Four fifty," Midge said.

Johnny wanted to tell her there was no need to go on. It had been sweet of her to bid him up to a respectable price.

"Five —"

"Five fifty," Midge said.

The man looked over at Midge. "You want him that bad, Midge honey?"

"I know his golf game," Midge said.

"Six hundred," the man said.

"Six fifty," Midge countered.

The auctioneer grinned. "I'm just standing here waiting for a street car, fellows and girls. Keep playing that sweet music."

Hal Hamner's supporter, however, seemed to have cooled off.

"Do I hear seven?" the auctioneer asked. "Seven? Do I hear seven? This is a steal, ladies and gentlemen. Six hundred and fifty dollars for a qualifier in this fine field. Do I hear seven? Well, I'm mortified to have to do this, but going, for six fifty to Midge Roper — going — going — going — Sold, to Midge Roper for six hundred and fifty dollars. Thanks, Johnny.

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. . . And now, the next qualifier is —"

Johnny stumbled down off the platform and headed for the open French windows. It didn't take him anywhere near where Midge was standing, but he glanced her way and she waved at him. He wished she hadn't bought him. It would only add to the pressure.

Inside, the auctioneer had started on the next player. Johnny wanted to get away, but he'd taken only a few steps along the terrace when he came face to face with Victor Sayles.

"Haven't seen you to congratulate you, Johnny. You must have played fine golf."

"Thanks, Mr. Sayles."

"Have you seen Duke Merritt anywhere?" Sayles asked. "I've been trying to find him for the auction and he doesn't seem to be around."

"I haven't seen him," Johnny said, "but Bob might know where he is."

"Would you mind — ?"

"I'd be glad to," Johnny said.

He headed for the pro shop, which was several hundred yards from the hotel. If old Bob hadn't turned in he'd be hanging around swapping yarns. Johnny found him, sitting on the grass back of the shop, his stubby black pipe glowing in the dark, regaling some youngsters with tales of the golf titans of another age.

"Got any idea where the Duke is?" Johnny asked. "They want him inside."

Bob took his pipe out of his mouth. "He's out on the course, practicing that trap shot on the eighth hole."

"In the dark?"

"He drove out in his car," Bob said. "Using the headlights, probably."

"Maybe we better go get him," Johnny said. "They've started the auction."

Bob got up, groaning over his old bones. One of the boys touched Johnny's sleeve. It was the youngster who was caddying for him.

"Can I go along with you, Mr. Yale?"

"Why not?" Johnny said. "My jalopy's in the parking lot."

A rough road, made by the tractors and trucks used in the upkeep of the course, wound its way along the edges of the fairways, around greens, over hummocks and mounds, and out to the far end of the course. As Johnny drove his car over a rise of ground they saw the headlights of the Duke's car, focused on the trap by the eighth green.

Bob chuckled. "The Duke is a great kidder, laddie, but golf is his bread and butter and he takes it seriously. He knows what might happen if he hit that trap tomorrow. He'd be remembering what happened today. He might tighten up. So he'll play the shot a couple of hundred times now till it's automatic and he won't remember anything except how easy it is."

"But after dark!" the young caddie marveled.

"I've seen him hit a hundred balls

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in the dead of night," Bob said. "Never go look for them. He figured out some kind of a hitch in his swing, maybe while he was eating supper, maybe after he'd gone to bed. He wouldn't wait till the next day to see if he was right. That's why he's at the top of the heap."

The jalopy pulled up beside the silver car. Johnny couldn't see any sign of the Duke in the trap. He got out of the car, followed by Bob.

"Hey, Duke!" he called.

No answer.

There would never be any answer, because when they'd gone a few feet farther they could see down over the rim of the trap. The Duke was there, spreadeagled in the sand, the blue and coral-pink of his slacks and shirt spotted with a darker red.

What happened right after that was a little confused in Johnny's mind. Old Bob had started down into the trap, but Johnny had stopped him. The terrible wound in the back of the Duke's head, obviously made by his having been brutally beaten with the sand wedge, made it clear there was nothing anyone could do to help.

Old Bob fought fiercely for a moment, trying to wrench himself free. "He may be alive, laddie, in spite of the way it looks.'

In the end Johnny went down. He knew the soft white sand would never hold any footprints that would be useful to the police. He reached out and touched the Duke's arm. It was cold. For a moment Johnny thought he was going to be sick.

He crawled back up out of the sand. Old Bob saw the answer in his face. He dropped down on the edge of the trap and began to rock, gently, back and forth. No words, only the gentle rocking and finally the slow tears rolling down his old cheeks.

"Can you drive that jalopy?" Johnny asked the caddie.

The boy nodded.

"Go back to the hotel and tell Mr. Sayles what's happened. He'll know what to do."

"He — he's dead?" the boy whispered.

"Somebody killed him," Johnny said.

Sayles and the others came from the hotel after that, and Johnny stumbled away into the night. He had known he was going to break, and it was part of his anger. He had shouted at Midge because he didn't want her to see it, but she came after him anyway. Poor Midge. It was bad for her, too. She was in love with the Duke.

Johnny walked diagonally across the fairway to where the twelfth tee was located and sat down on the bench there. Midge sat down beside him. She didn't speak, but she reached out a cold hand to him and locked her fingers in his. Finally Johnny had himself under control.

"My father died when I was seventeen," he said. "He worked so hard he never had a chance to give me much time. Never, in my whole life, till the Duke came along, did anyone care what happened to me."

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Midge didn't speak, and he turned to look at her. She was staring, dry-eyed, into the darkness.

"Whoever did it —" Johnny said, grimly. "Whoever did it —"

Her fingers tightened around his.

"I know how you feel," he said. "I wish there was something I could do to make it easier."

"Johnny," she whispered.

"There's only one person I ever heard say a bad thing about him, or be unfriendly to him: Hal Hamner."

They heard a siren in the distance, and presently the State Police car came bumping out over the tractor road, red light blinking over the center of the windshield.

"You'll have to go back over there," Midge said, in a flat voice. "You found him."

Johnny nodded. "There'll be details. He had nobody but Bob and me — and you." He stood up. "I shouldn't have left Bob. It's just about the end of the world for him."

As Johnny and Midge approached the eighth green again, cars were beginning to pull away and head back for the hotel. Apparently the arrivals in the State Police car didn't want a crowd around while they examined the scene of the crime.

"You better go on back," Johnny said to Midge.

She nodded. "I'll be at the hotel when you come back. There's Paul Talbert over there. I drove out with him." She touched his arm. "Luck, Johnny."

Johnny watched her join the tall young man in the dinner jacket and get into his car. Then he moved slowly toward the green. The lights showed several men down in the sand with the body. Old Bob still sat on the edge of the trap, rocking slowly back and forth.

It was then that Johnny saw a man and a woman standing very close together behind one of the cars, talking earnestly. The woman was Sue Hamner, and for a moment Johnny thought the man was Hal. The headlight of a turning car struck the couple for an instant, and Johnny saw that the man, whose arm was around Sue's shoulder, as if he was supporting her from falling, was Victor Sayles, the manager of Mountain Grove.

The county attorney was a man named George Franks. He was businesslike and unflustered. He stood at the rim of the trap, giving instructions to the two troopers and two men in business suits who were down in the trap. One of them was a photographer. One of them was handling the bloodstained sand wedge gingerly, as though it was a high explosive. He looked up at Franks.

"Not a ghost of a chance of any decent prints," he said.

"Well, we can't have everything," Franks said dryly. "Where's the other fellow who found him?"

"Here, sir," Johnny said, and moved forward.

Franks looked him over, appraisingly, but without antagonism. "You

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and the old man came out here to look for him?"

"In my car," Johnny said. "There was a caddie with us named Everett. I sent him back for help."

"You're Johnny Yale?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you found him just as he is now?"

"Yes."

"Didn't touch anything?"

"I went down into the trap," Johnny said. "I figured the sand wouldn't hold any prints that would be valuable to you. I — I had to make sure."

"You moved him?"

"No. I just touched his arm. It — it was cold. From the look of the wound —"

"I should think so!" Franks said. He looked at Bob Christie. "He seems to be pretty hard hit."

"It's like losing his own kid," Johnny said. "There's nothing he can tell you, anyway. We rode out here in the car and found him. We sent Everett for help and just waited here till it came."

Franks nodded. "I'm going to ask you to make a formal statement to one of my men. You can take the old man back to the hotel and wait there if you like."

"Thanks," Johnny said. He started to turn away, and then stopped. Duke Merritt's heavy leather bag of golf clubs lay on the ground near where they were standing.

"Mr. Franks!" Johnny's voice was sharp.

"Yes?"

"Those are Duke's clubs. Have you looked them over?"

"Not specially. We're only interested in that wedge in the trap."

"That's what I mean," Johnny said. "The Duke's wedge is there in his bag."

Franks hesitated. "So he had two wedges."

Johnny shook his head. "I don't know how much you know about tournament golf, Mr. Franks, but we're only allowed to carry fourteen clubs. If you get caught out on the course with more than fourteen you're disqualified."

"So?"

"The Duke had extra clubs, a couple of sets of 'em. But he kept them in separate bags. He'd never carry the extra wedge — if it's his — in this bag, for fear he might forget it when he started out on a round."

"So he'd take it out when he went back to the pro shop."

Johnny shook his head stubbornly. "It was a thing with him. He got caught with an extra club in his bag in a tournament — was disqualified and lost himself a thousand bucks. He made a point of it. Never put an extra club in this regular bag, even if he was just going to carry it across the street. Ask Bob."

Franks spoke to the fingerprint man, who handed up the bloodstained wedge. Franks went over to Bob and held the wedge out in front of him.

"Mr. Christie, is this Duke Merritt's sand wedge?"

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Old Bob seemed to pull himself back from a long distance. His pale eyes focused on the club for a minute. "Of course not," he said.

"How can you be sure?"

"A manufacturer makes his clubs for him," Bob said. "Trade name — 'Duke Merritt Irons.' Naturally, he used them. That's a Nichol club."

"He wouldn't even have a different make of club among his extras?"

"What kind of business would it be for him to use anything but a 'Duke Merritt Iron'?"

Franks looked at Johnny. "Any way to tell who owns this?"

"Sure," Johnny said. "Find a bag of Nichol clubs in the pro shop. See that number on the back of the club? It's part of a registered set."

"That ought to do it for us," Franks said. "Take the old man back to the hotel and wait for me in Sayles's office."

"I think he'll want to stay until they move the body," Johnny said.

Franks turned his head. "That looks like the ambulance coming across the fairway now."

Johnny moved away. He wanted to think. Nichol irons. He tried to remember who used them. He got a cigarette out of his pocket. As he struck a match someone touched his arm. He turned, and looked down into Sue Hamner's white face.

"Could I speak to you alone a minute, Johnny?" she asked, her voice almost inaudible.

He glanced at Franks. The county attorney was busy with his two assistants. They moved a few yards away from the trap.

"I know what you must be thinking," Sue said.

"He was killed in cold blood — beaten to death."

She looked exhausted. "You're thinking of Hal. It's no secret how he felt about Duke Merritt."

He turned to her slowly. "Why did he feel that way?" he asked.

Her eyes widened. "He was jealous of him, Johnny. Wrongly — but he was jealous of him."

"Wrongly?" Bitterness welled up in Johnny. "I used to think so. Now I wonder."

"Johnny!"

"You and Sayles," Johnny said. "The day we got here — I saw that you knew him. You hid it from your husband. Maybe he's right to be jealous of you. Maybe you drove him to kill the Duke."

She lifted her hand to her face as if he'd struck her. "Let the police handle it, Johnny," she whispered. "Don't point to Hal. Let them handle it. Please, Johnny!"

Before he could say anything Johnny saw Sayles come up beside Sue Hamner. "Something wrong, Mrs. Hamner?" he asked quietly.

"No — no. I was just telling Johnny how sorry I am. I —"

"It's rough on you, Johnny," Sayles said. He turned to Sue: "May I drive you back to the hotel?"

Sue looked at Johnny, pleading. Then she nodded to Sayles. "Thank you," she said.

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Johnny stood there, watching them walk across the grass to Sayles's car.

Old Bob wouldn't budge until the Duke's body had been transferred to the ambulance which was to take it to the local undertaking parlor. Then he allowed Johnny to take him over to the jalopy and drive him back to the parking lot at the hotel. Neither man made any move to get out of the car once they were there. Johnny was still seething with anger as a result of his exchange with Sue Hamner. It was beyond him why she should be so anxious to protect a husband who so obviously gave her a bad time.

A long, shuddering sigh from the old man made Johnny reach out a comforting hand to him. "I don't know what to say to you, Bob."

"It's all right, laddie. We both know how we feel."

Johnny was still thinking about Sue. "There were people who didn't like him, Bob."

"The Duke was the Duke," Bob said. "He was a consistent winner, laddie, and the people who are consistent losers didn't like him. That's human nature. They envied him his ability, his personality, his way with a gallery."

"But to kill him for such a reason!"

"He had a weakness, laddie. You and I know it. The reason could have had to do with a woman."

"I'll never forget the way Hamner looked when he tried to get at the Duke yesterday," Johnny said.

Old Bob didn't answer.

"It didn't just happen by chance," Johnny said. "Duke was out there practicing, and somebody knew it. Somebody went there to see him, carrying that sand wedge. It wasn't an accident. Whoever it was went prepared."

Old Bob didn't comment. He sat there for a moment with his eyes closed. Then he pulled himself up. "We'd better be getting into the office, laddie. There'll be a lot of things to decide before this night's over."

They got out of the car and walked toward the front entrance of the hotel.

Sayles was in his office, cleaning off the top of his desk. "Franks is taking over here," he said. "He wants you to wait here?"

"Yes," Johnny said.

"Glad you got here ahead of him," Sayles said. "He's decided the tournament is to go on. He's got to hold people here till this thing is cleared up, and he thinks it would be better if they were kept busy. Because of the pool the Duke will have to be defaulted. The point is, will you be playing through, Johnny?"

Johnny wanted to laugh. Play a golf tournament after this? Face Hal Hamner in the first round? "I couldn't," he said.

"He'll play through," old Bob said.

"Now, look, Bob; I —"

"You're a golfer, laddie," the old man said. "It's your business. You came of age today as a player. When

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you're as old as I am you'll have learned that people die — one way or another. You have to go on. The Duke would have said the same thing to you. You know that."

Sayles picked up a last paper from the top of his desk. "You and Hamner are due to tee off at 9:15 in the morning," he said. "You don't have to decide now. We'll leave you penciled in."

"He'll play," Bob said.

Johnny turned and walked over to the window, looking out into the night. The old man walked up behind him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"We're both lost, laddie, without him. I more than you. I brought him up, you might say. It was a good day for me, Johnny, when we found you. Without you, I would have nothing left at all."

"You can decide it later," Sayles said. He started for the door, and hesitated there. "You've known the Duke almost all his life, Mr. Christie."

"Since he was twelve," Bob said.

Sayles took a cigarette from his case and tapped it on the back of his hand. "Did he ever mention me?"

Bob's forehead narrowed in a scowl of concentration. "Not that I remember, Mr. Sayles. Did you know him from somewhere else?"

"Not exactly," Sayles said. "Of course I'd seen him play — from the gallery."

"He'd not be likely to remember you from that."

"I just thought that possibly, in connection with this tournament —"

"I never heard your name until we signed up here yesterday," Bob said.

"I was just wondering," Sayles said. He lit his cigarette. "If there's anything I can do for either of you . . ." He turned and went out.

Johnny stood there, remembering the picture of Sayles and Sue Hamner caught in the headlights of a turning car. If he didn't know the Duke, why should the Duke have mentioned him?

Before he could discuss it with Bob, Franks's assistant arrived and sat them down in two big chairs near the desk. He poised a pencil over a yellow pad. There was something so impersonal about it that Johnny's anger rose to the surface.

"Your name is Johnny Yale?" the man asked.

"Why aren't you out there, doing something, instead of grilling us?" Johnny asked hotly. "We didn't kill him!"

"You two found him," the man said. "It's my job to get your story."

It took about fifteen minutes. Johnny was just signing his name under Bob's when Franks himself appeared. He seemed excited and pleased.

"We found out who owns this wedge," he said, holding up the murder weapon.

"Who?" Johnny asked eagerly.

"It was stupid of all of us not to recognize at the time that it was a light club — a woman's club," Franks said.

"A woman!"

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"Yes," Franks said casually. "A girl they call Midge Roper."

Johnny stood there, still holding the pen with which he'd signed the statement. *Midge!*

"That's crazy," he said. "She was in love with him."

Franks gave him a quizzical look. "I didn't say she did it. I said it was her sand wedge. You know her?"

"Of course I know her. She's been following along with us the last few tournaments. She was all out for the Duke! She wouldn't have harmed him."

"Okay," Franks said. "Take it easy. I just said it was her wedge."

Old Bob spoke up: "There's over two hundred sets of clubs stored in the pro shop, mister," he said. "It happens I put Midge's clubs away for her myself this afternoon. She'd been practicing. She wanted to watch Johnny, here, play up the eighteenth and I took her clubs and put 'em away for her. It's just a mischance the murderer took her club."

"All right, fellows; don't shoot," Franks said. "We're just feeling our way, trying to get some facts to work with."

"I can give you facts," Johnny said. "I can —"

He didn't finish, because just then the office door opened and a State Trooper came in, escorting Midge. She gave Johnny a quick, half-frightened look, and then confronted Franks. In spite of her heavy sun tan Johnny could see that the color had drained from her face.

"You two can go," Franks said to Johnny. "You'll need some rest if you're going to play in the morning."

"I'd like them to stay," Midge said to Franks, without looking around. "If you have no objections —"

Franks smiled reassuringly. "Sure thing. This is quite informal at the moment, Miss Roper." He picked up the sand wedge. "Recognize this?"

"Is that — is it the one that —?"

"Yes."

"It looks like mine," Midge said slowly. "It's like mine."

"Could you identify it by the registration number?"

"Registration number?"

"It's from a matched set, Miss Roper. It has a registration number, in case you wanted to replace it."

"I never even noticed it," she said.

"Nobody ever does," Johnny broke in. "I've got a registered set, but I haven't got the faintest idea what the number is. It's written down on my insurance policy, I guess."

"If I told you it is from your set, Miss Roper?"

"Then I guess it's mine. It's exactly like mine."

Franks leaned against the desk, studying her, waiting.

"What do you want me to say, Mr. Franks?" she asked.

"Johnny tells me that you and Duke Merritt were — shall we say, engaged?"

"That's not true," Midge said, looking straight at him.

"Well, then, you were in love with him?"

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"No."

"Just what was your relationship?" Franks asked, a little less friendly.

"Suppose I refuse to answer that?"

Franks smiled again. "Why should you, Miss Roper?"

She never took her eyes from his face. "What's the phrase? On the grounds that it might incriminate me?"

"Midge!" Johnny protested.

"Keep quiet, Johnny," she said, without turning her head.

Franks took a cigarette out of his pocket and tapped it on the back of his hand. "You're not under arrest, Miss Roper. You can do as you please about it — for the moment."

"The script went wrong, you see," Midge said, in a small voice.

"The script?"

"I should have been the — the one out there in the trap," Midge said.

"Go on — if you care to, Miss Roper," Franks said.

"I — I was out to get him," Midge Roper said. "If he had found out —"

"Get him?"

"He was a heel, Mr. Franks," Midge said. "A low-grade, blackmailing heel!"

Johnny felt as though he were in another world, unable to believe what he heard. Suddenly it came tumbling out of her, and it was as if she was talking about somebody he'd never known. Certainly not the gay, laughing, kind-hearted Duke.

She spoke of her brother, and with the mention of Ed Roper's name the room grew quiet.

"I was with Ed less than an hour before he died," Midge said, in a flat, colorless voice. This, it seemed, was a pain she had learned to control. "He had wired me that he was in trouble and I'd flown out to the coast. But because he was young and ashamed of himself he had delayed getting in touch with me, and I got there too late to help him. He had lost money — a great deal of money — in a gambling house in Las Vegas. He was being pressed to pay it, and he was at his wit's end.

"Before I got there he was approached by someone who offered him a solution. If he would sign an agreement to play pro basketball after his graduation they would pay him a bonus for signing. Eddie fell for it, and then discovered there was a small catch: His team must not win the championship. He was desperate for money and he agreed, and what he signed would have sent him to jail if he doublecrossed the gamblers."

She took a deep breath. "The man who first approached him — first persuaded him — was Duke Merritt."

"No!" old Bob said softly.

"You want proof? I haven't got it. If I had I'd have gone to the district attorney. Ed had talked to Merritt in some local restaurant. There was no possible way of proving what they'd talked about. I only had Ed's word for it, but I believed him. Ed killed himself rather than betray his teammates. Duke Merritt was responsible. He might just as well have pushed Ed out that window."

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The room was silent as she paused.

"I decided I could never have a happy day until I exposed Duke Merritt for what he really was. I arranged to meet him about a month ago as the pros were coming north. I played up to him." Her lips curled downward. "He was so vain he took it as a matter of course that I should fall in love with him. I took his pawing and his air of ownership *because I wanted to get him!* Some day I was sure he'd tip his hand and I'd have the evidence I wanted!"

"I asked you to stay, Johnny, for one reason. I've been friendly with you. I've let you know that I liked you — you and Bob. I never suspected either of you of being part of the Duke's real picture. I want you to know that." She turned back to Franks: "Don't look for your motive, Mr. Franks, in some trivial golfing feud. The man was a leech, a bloodsucker, sadistic and cruel. It isn't for me to tell you where to look, but there are people here at Mountain Grove, people who have been traveling with Merritt all winter, people in cities and towns all over the country, who are celebrating tonight — in spite of the fear his death may reveal something they wanted to hide." She drew a deep breath. "You may be sure of one thing. He was killed by someone who couldn't stand it any longer."

"I am sure of that, Miss Roper," Franks said. "You see, after I'd identified the sand wedge as yours, I made a few inquiries."

"Oh?" Midge said in a small voice.

"Merritt was with you on the hotel terrace when he decided to go out to the eighth green to practice. He told you he was going, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"It would be useless to deny that, Miss Roper, because he said it in the presence of several people. It would also be useless to deny that you were seen, walking across the course just after dusk. The young man with whom you were to have dinner — his name is Talbert? — was looking for you. He met you as you came in from having been out there — with Merritt."

"Yes," Midge said, very slowly. "I was out there. But not with Duke Merritt."

"No?"

"I went out because he asked me to, and because I was playing the game of pleasing him. But when I got there —"

"Yes, Miss Roper?"

"He was dead," Midge said.

Franks waited a moment. "And you didn't think it a matter worth reporting?"

Midge's head was high and she met Franks's level gaze steadily. "It was quite deliberate," she said. "If the person who killed Duke Merritt needed time to cover his tracks, I was prepared to help him get it!"

"Midge!" The word exploded out of Johnny. "Midge, you're wrong. Your brother must have lied to you. I *knew* the Duke! Bob has known him all his life. It wasn't in him to be

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the kind of person or do the kind of thing you're talking about."

"You didn't know him," Midge said. She turned. "I know your story, Johnny. But look back over the clippings some day."

"Clippings?"

"'The Horatio Alger kid,'" Midge said. "Go back and read those stories, Johnny. They're all about Duke Merritt and what a fine guy he was. Do you think he'd have loaned you a thin dime, or given you five minutes of his time, if it hadn't been to his advantage?"

"He didn't have to help me!"

"He knew a good thing when he saw it," Midge said. "A good thing for himself. Old Bob was the same sort of good thing. How many stories have you read in the syndicated sports columns about how Duke Merritt didn't forget the old pro who'd taught him the game of golf, when that oldtimer was down on his luck? It's one of the classic sob stories of the sports world!"

"Shut up!" Johnny shouted at her. "*Shut up!*"

"Too many people have shut up for too long, Johnny," Midge said.

Franks, his lips drawn together in a thin line, turned to Johnny. "You and the old man — out!" he said. "This has stopped being informal. It seems Miss Roper is a material witness."

"You're not saying you think she —"

"Out," Franks said.

Johnny felt Bob's hand on his arm, tugging at him gently. He shook it off. "The whole thing is crazy!" he said. "Midge has got it wrong. You don't live and travel with a guy for months without knowing him. That part of it can be straightened out. But you're letting the one guy who had it in for the Duke have time to fix himself up a story."

"Who is that?" Franks asked.

"Hamner! Hal Hamner. He would have killed the Duke yesterday afternoon if there hadn't been people around to stop him. There are witnesses to that!"

"The Duke was careful to choose a moment to play the hero when he was quite safe. Isn't that true, Johnny?" Midge said.

"Midge! You've gotten yourself all confused by some foolish story."

"Would my brother just pick Duke Merritt's name out of the air?" Midge asked.

"He lied to you. He —"

"All right," Franks said sharply. "That's enough."

The trooper who had been standing near the door came toward Johnny. "You'll have to leave now, bud," he said.

"Why not let him stay, Mr. Franks?" Midge said in that strange, flat voice. "He's got to know the truth, sooner or later, about his superman."

"Get Hamner here," Johnny said. "Find out where he was when the Duke was killed, what he was doing. That's all I ask. We can straighten Midge out later. So she was wrong

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not reporting to you. It wouldn't have saved the Duke's life. If it gave anyone a chance to get away you'll soon know. That would be as good as a confession, wouldn't it?"

Franks hesitated.

"If this story of Midge's gets out we can never call it back. The Duke can't defend himself, but Bob and I can defend him if you'll give us a chance. Find the murderer. That's the thing you want, isn't it? Then we can straighten Midge out later."

Franks turned to the trooper. "Get Hamner," he said.

Johnny felt like a man hanging over a cliff, reaching for a hold he knew would crumble. Anyone but Midge, and he wouldn't have had any doubt at all in the back of his mind. Midge wasn't lying. She was just wrong. Franks seemed to have suspended operations until Hamner was found, and Johnny moved over to where Midge stood.

"Look," he said. "Doesn't it show there was something crazy? If Duke had been involved in any way with your brother, wouldn't he have suspected you? The same name. He'd have stayed shy of you, wouldn't he, if he'd been guilty?"

Midge looked up at him with tired eyes. "He knew who I was. We even talked about Ed. But he took it for granted I didn't suspect him. He took it for granted he was irresistible."

"So maybe he was a little vain about women."

"A little vain!"

"But if he was guilty he'd have been bound to suspect you had a reason for playing up to him."

"The Duke could do no wrong," she said. "He would have laughed if anyone suggested he'd made a mistake anywhere along the way."

Bob Christie had come up behind Johnny, and once more his hand was on Johnny's arm. "There's nothing for you and the lass to quarrel about, Johnny. She believes what she's telling you. You believe what you're telling her. The truth will come out of it in the end."

"Tell her about the Duke, Bob!" Johnny said.

The old man shook his head. "It wouldn't do any good right now, laddie. We need facts to show her."

"But —"

"We'll get them, laddie. Never fear. There's a killer somewhere close by who must be found, and then we'll get the facts."

The office door suddenly opened, before Johnny could say any more, and Sue Hamner stood there, white and breathless. "Mr. Franks?"

"Yes," the prosecutor said.

"I'm Sue Hamner — Mrs. Hal Hamner. I understand you're looking for my husband."

"Yes. Do you know where he is?"

"He's in a gripe session, in the locker room at the club."

"Gripe session?" Franks asked.

Johnny knew what she meant. The pros were meeting to discuss the tournament, make complaints to their traveling committee. They al-

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ways had gripes. They griped about everything — prize totals, weather, courses, rules, starting times, pairings, exhibition dates on off days, caddies, galleries, turf, greens, fairways, boundary markings, officials, adverse penalties, newcomers who played too well, spectators, and dozens of items that cropped up every day. Hamner was a member of the pros' grievance committee. They were probably discussing now whether the Duke should be defaulted in the match play tomorrow, or whether there should be a play-off for the place made vacant by his death. They would have marked the Duke's death with a few platitudes and then gone straight on with their business.

"I want to tell you something," Sue was saying to Franks, "before you talk to my husband."

"Well, Mrs. Hamner?"

Sue looked at Johnny, almost reproachfully, as if she knew that Hal's being called was his doing. "Hal hated the Duke," she said. "But it was my fault. The Duke paid a great deal of attention to me along the trail this winter. Hal was jealous. It seemed to him he had a right to be. I — I should have been able to get rid of the Duke, and I didn't. Hal had a right to be angry."

"You love your husband, Mrs. Hamner?"

She drew a deep breath. "With all my heart," she said.

Johnny stared at her. He remembered the bruise on her cheek. How could she love a man like Hal?

"Then why didn't you discourage Merritt's attentions?"

"I couldn't," she said.

"You mean he was so persuasive that —?"

"Yes. He was persuasive."

"So you didn't discourage him, and it enraged your husband, and now you're here to tell us it was your fault."

"I *couldn't* discourage him," Sue said.

"You liked him?"

"I hated him," Sue said, with such uncontrolled violence that it shocked Johnny. "*I hated him!*"

"Then I don't understand," Franks said.

"There were reasons I can't give you," Sue said. "But you've got to understand that Hal can't be blamed. I drove him to it."

"Drove him to what, Mrs. Hamner?"

"His hatred of Duke." She caught in her breath, realizing the full implication of the question. "He hated him, and everybody is going to tell you that. But he didn't kill him."

"How do you know, Mrs. Hamner? Can you account for your husband's time tonight?"

"No," she said slowly. "But I know Hal. He might have beaten him up with his fists. But he would never attack him from behind with a club. He didn't need him dead. He just needed him out of our lives."

"And you couldn't help him," Franks said.

"I couldn't help him," Sue said, so

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low that Johnny could barely hear her.

The trooper appeared in the doorway then with Hal Hamner. The tall Southerner's dark, brooding eyes blinked for an instant at the sight of his wife, and then were lowered.

Sue took a quick step toward him. "Hal!"

He didn't look up. He didn't respond in any way.

"I think you know why I've sent for you, Hamner," Franks said.

Hamner didn't answer, or lift his head.

"You hated Duke Merritt. You were jealous of him. You had actually attempted a physical attack on him yesterday. We don't have to go into that if you can account for your time tonight — say between 7 and 9:30."

Hamner looked up, and his eyes were dazed. "He wouldn't let Sue alone," he said, "and she wouldn't tell him off."

"Between 7 and 9:30, Mr. Hamner." Franks might just as well not have spoken.

"I went to him," Hamner said. "I asked him to let her alone." The deep voice was harsh, but the eyes had the look of a badly hurt child. "I never was in love before. I never thought someone loved me. I never had someone to hold to me who was all my own."

"Hal!" Sue whispered.

"I told him there were other women — women who weren't needed, the way Sue was needed. I — I guess I was a little crazy. You can't need a woman who doesn't want you. But it seemed like it. It seemed like it to me."

Johnny looked at Sue. Her fingers were twisting at a handkerchief. When Hamner hesitated the only sound in the room was a choked sob from her.

"I went to her," Hamner said. "There was something — I don't know what — she couldn't, I guess. She just couldn't give him up."

"Hal!"

"Then I began to boil up inside. I — I went to him once more. I asked him — nice and quiet. I asked him to let her alone."

Johnny moistened his lips. "He was just trying to be kind to her, Hamner, because you treated her badly."

The dark eyes turned to Johnny and he felt shriveled inside.

"I know," Hamner said. "Like — like the thing I did yesterday, calling her names in public. Accusing her in public. I — well, you're his boy, Yale. It was like she'd done the sewing for *him*. I'd been begging her. Then she did the sewing, and it was like it was for him." The dark eyes burned into Johnny. "You were like a part of him — you and the old man."

The eyes lowered and Johnny felt cold along his spine.

"So — so I begged him to let her alone. And he gave me an answer. He laughed — and he gave me an answer: 'You tell Sue to ask me to leave her alone and I will.' That's what he said. So I asked her." He took a deep, quavering breath. "She

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cried, and I knew — I knew she couldn't." He shook his head slowly. "That was tonight — after the scene I made yesterday. I went to him and I asked him, and he laughed and he said what he said. He was in the locker room, putting on his golf shoes. He — he was going out to practice."

It seemed to be the end. Franks spoke, matter-of-factly: "What did you do then?"

"I went to Sue, like I said. I — I asked her, and she cried. It was in our room. She was dressing for dinner."

"Then?"

Again the slow shaking of the head. "I don't know. I got out of the room. I just wandered around. People kept talking to me — congratulating me on the good round I played today. I wanted to get away from them. I — I don't know where I went."

"Out onto the golf course?"

"Just around," Hamner said. "Oh, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying I don't remember — that I might have gone out to talk to him on the course and that I don't remember. It's not that. I was just around — no particular place. Finally I went to the auction. That was before the news came about — about him. I had a crazy plan. I figured to buy myself in the pool — and then win it. I figured there'd be enough money then to get away for a while. Maybe I could get Sue back to me somehow."

"Did you buy yourself, Mr. Hamner?"

Hamner shook his head. "The price ran too high — forty-one hundred dollars. It doesn't matter now. The Duke's boy here," and he glanced at Johnny, "would probably have gotten hot and pinned my ears back. The Duke would always beat me somehow. He's beat me for good now. I figured I might show him up somehow. I figured time might work for me. He might get tired of her, or she of him. But now — well, now he's dead he'll always stay just the way he was to her. You can't beat that, can you? He'll be set up against me all the rest of my life. He'll always look good and I'll always look bad."

You could have heard a pin drop in the room after that. The silence was broken by Midge. She walked straight up to Hamner and stood in front of him.

"Your wife hated Duke Merritt, Hal," she said. "Maybe if you ask her now she can tell you why she couldn't send him away."

Everyone in the room but Hamner was looking at Sue. She stared back at them with wide, frightened eyes. Then, suddenly, she turned and fled.

Hamner spoke without looking at Midge. "Thanks, anyway, Miss Roper," he said.

All Johnny wanted then was to get out of there. For weeks he'd felt nothing but contempt for Hal Hamner. Now he didn't know. Somehow, the way the big man had told his story left you no choice but to believe he'd felt the way he said he had. Johnny had the feeling that when Franks did some careful checking

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they'd find Hamner had never been out on the course. There was something about his story, something about Sue's behavior, that made him feel sick inside. After all — what about the Duke?

Franks was giving orders to his assistant and the trooper. The business of checking Hamner's movements was to be started at once. Midge had cornered the prosecutor and Johnny could hear her asking permission to go to Sue Hamner. Franks must have felt that there was a chance Midge might get Sue to talk, because he let Midge go.

"The rest of you don't have to wait in this office," he said. "But stay close at hand where I can find you."

Johnny felt Bob's hand on his sleeve again, and this time he willingly let himself be led out of the room. They walked across the lobby and out onto the deserted terrace. The old man's face had a grim, purposeful look to it. Once they were outside he turned and faced Johnny.

"There are things you've got to get in your head, laddie," he said.

"You bet, Bob," Johnny said. "You knew him. You know those things they said can't be true. Hamner sounded like he was telling the truth, but —"

"There's a murderer very close to us, and he's got to be found," old Bob said. "The rest of it can be cleared up later."

"Finding the murderer is Franks's job," Johnny said. "What we've got to do is —"

"There's nothing we can do the way we're fixed," old Bob said. "We've got no cash, and there are things we could use cash for. The Duke had friends we could reach by phone. We should be getting in touch with his lawyer. All that takes cash. The Duke had plenty on him, but the cops have taken that. I was wondering —"

"I've only got a few bucks till I get paid my qualifying purse," Johnny said.

"I was thinking that," old Bob said. "There's money due you, and there's money due the Duke. I was thinking maybe Mr. Sayles would advance it to us."

"No harm in asking," Johnny said. "You're right, Bob. The people the Duke was working for — the clothing firm, the sporting-goods people, the club he played out of in California — they'd all want to help us keep his name clear. They've got money invested in that name."

"Yes, laddie, they would. And if we can get the wheels rolling with a few long-distance calls —"

Johnny put his arm around the old man's shoulder. "You're a wonderful old guy, Robert," he said. "I thought you'd caved in completely, but it was me that did the caving. Let's find Sayles."

The desk clerk called Sayles's suite in the hotel and told him Bob and Johnny wanted to see him. Sayles asked to have them sent up. They went up the wide stairway to the second floor and down the hall.

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Sayles had taken off his dinner jacket and was wearing a corduroy coat.

"You said if there was anything you could do to help," old Bob said.

"Sure. Come in," Sayles said.

He had a sitting room and bedroom, nicely furnished. As manager of the resort he probably gave private parties here, Johnny thought. The walls were covered with framed photographs of people in the sports world: golfers, skiers, fighters, hockey stars, football players, promoters, actors.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you two could use a drink," Sayles said, crossing to chromium and red leather bar-on-wheels in the corner of the room.

"I wouldn't mind a wee touch," old Bob said, "but Johnny's got a golf match to play tomorrow."

"Ginger ale, Johnny?"

"No, thanks."

Sayles came over from the bar with two old-fashioned glasses more than half filled with liquor, and handed one to Bob. He raised his own glass. "There's nothing much to drink to, Bob, except to hope we never have another day like this as long as we live."

"Amen," the old man said.

"What is it you wanted of me, boys?" Sayles asked.

"It's a matter of cash," Bob said. "There are phone calls we should make. The Duke's sponsors should be notified. There's his lawyer. Johnny and I are both flat. We thought perhaps you'd advance us Johnny's purse and the Duke's."

"Good heavens!" Sayles said. "Franks has impounded the Duke's money, hasn't he? I don't see any reason why I shouldn't pay you, Bob — and Johnny, of course. If there's any trouble about it, you can consider it a loan."

"That's really very kind of you, Mr. Sayles," Bob said.

"I've got a small safe over here," Sayles said. He went over to the side wall and moved one of the pictures. Behind it was a wall safe. He turned the dial and opened it. Then he brought a green metal box over to the center table. Old Bob watched as Sayles unlocked the box with a key on the ring in his pocket. It was filled with cash. He began counting it off.

"— six hundred, seven, eight, nine, one thousand." He looked up, smiling pleasantly. "Okay?"

"Five hundred goes to Johnny," Bob said. "But the Duke's share —"

"Five hundred," Sayles said. "Same as Johnny — for qualifying."

Old Bob put his glass down on a table. "Surely that isn't the amount you expected to pay the Duke."

Johnny turned to look at Bob, and was aware of a strange tension. The old man just stood there, smiling at Sayles, a crooked little smile Johnny had never seen before.

Sayles was motionless, the stack of bills still in his hand. The table lamp threw shadows on his face that seemed to change him. "I don't think I understand, Bob," he said quietly.

"We don't have to pretend with each other, do we now, Mr. Sayles?"

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Johnny opened his mouth to speak, and closed it. This was over his head.

Sayles's eyes shifted for an instant to Johnny, and then back to the old man. "I think you'd better say, quite clearly, what it is you have in mind, Bob."

"It's a little matter of murder, Mr. Sayles," Bob said.

Sayles laughed. It was short and mirthless. "You're dreaming, Bob. And I'm surprised you'd think of taking money to keep the Duke's murder quiet. Franks has checked me — inside out. I never left the hotel till I got the news from you."

Old Bob nodded. It was horrible, somehow, like the nod of a slightly unbalanced person. Instinctively Johnny moved toward him.

"Bob," he said gently.

The old man waved him away, a sly, almost unpleasant gesture. "You would be careful about such things, Mr. Sayles," he said, "but it so happens I wasn't talking about the Duke's murder. Not yet at any rate."

The lid of the metal box in Sayles's hand closed with a snap. "I think you'd better get him out of here, Johnny," he said. "He's gone off his rocker. That money on the table's for you." He turned and took the box back to the safe.

"Don't put the money away, Mr. Sayles," old Bob said.

"Bob," Johnny whispered, sick at heart. "We'd better be going, old-timer."

"Not yet, laddie. And don't interfere. Mr. Sayles knows what I'm talking about." A cackling laugh seeped out of his twisted mouth. "You don't think the Duke would run the risk of keeping things all to himself, Mr. Sayles, do you? He'd protect himself. You can see that. He had me to back him up. So you can see — five hundred dollars isn't nearly enough, Mr. Sayles."

Sayles turned around from the safe, and the hair rose on the back of Johnny's neck. Sayles had an ugly-looking automatic in his right hand. "So he told you about the Roper business, eh?" Sayles said.

"Roper!" Johnny said. "Midge Roper?"

He might as well not have been there. Sayles, suave and cool, and old Bob, a caricature of himself, were concerned only with their own talk. Old Bob sidled forward, crablike, ignoring the gun.

"Aye, Mr. Sayles. Now, you make the amount right, and you and the lady won't have to go to jail. Suppose I just go over to that safe and count out for myself what seems like a reasonable amount. That would be the easiest way, wouldn't it?"

Bob was directly in front of Sayles now, and suddenly he reached for the gun. Sayles's reflexes were much too young, too quick for him. He swung his gun hand across Bob's face, and the old man staggered back, clapping his hands over his eyes. Then, while Johnny stood there, frozen, the gun came up and down twice, in a chopping motion, on the side of Bob's head.

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Bob went down, just as Johnny lunged at Sayles. It was an uneven business from the beginning. Slight and wiry, Johnny was twenty pounds lighter than the older man. Moreover, Sayles seemed to be an old hand at what he was doing. He whipped at Johnny's head with the gun, handling it with the skill a fencer might use with a foil. Johnny never got in one good punch. The butt of the gun thundered against his skull. He felt himself falling, and instinctively he tried to cover old Bob's body.

At the same instant he heard the sound of splintering wood and a loud, angry voice — familiar, but in the fog of his pain, momentarily unidentifiable. The slugging had stopped and he tried to pick himself up. He did get his head turned just in time to see Hal Hamner break Sayles's gun arm over his knee as he might have snapped a piece of kindling wood back in the Tennessee hills.

Johnny struggled up to his feet. "Thank heavens, you showed up," he said. "He'd have killed us both."

Hamner turned on him, straddling the groaning Sayles, who lay on the floor, hugging his broken arm. "You cheap, chiseling little punk," he said. He started for Johnny.

Johnny backed away. "What's the matter with you, Hamner? What —?"

"Hal!" It was a small, clear voice. Midge had come into the room. "Hal, stop it!"

Hamner hesitated, balanced on the balls of his feet, never taking his smoldering eyes off Johnny.

"You owe me something, Hal!" Midge said. "Stop it!" She came on into the room and knelt beside old Bob. "Call a doctor. He's badly hurt. Hurry."

Hamner hesitated, and then slowly turned to the phone on the center table.

"And get Mr. Franks here," Midge said. She looked up at Johnny. "Bring something to cover him with, Johnny. He must be kept warm."

Johnny went into the bedroom, ripped a blanket off the bed, and brought it back to her. Hamner was standing by the phone, staring down at Sayles. Midge wrapped the blanket around old Bob, and then she stood up.

"They were going on with it," Hamner said. "They were trying to collect from Sayles. They were going on with it."

"I don't believe it," Midge said flatly.

"I heard them!" Hamner said. "I heard the old man asking for dough —"

Midge looked at Johnny and he shook his head wearily. "Bob did ask him for money," he said. "I didn't understand it. He — he mentioned you —"

Midge put out her hand and rested it on his arm. "I persuaded Sue Hamner to tell Hal the truth," she said. Her eyes were very bright. "My brother didn't kill himself, Johnny. He was murdered — by Victor Sayles."

Sayles had struggled to his feet. His right arm dangled at a grotesque angle below the elbow. Agonized sweat ran down his face.

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Hamner stepped over Bob's body and stood in front of him.

"Sue's turning State's evidence," he said, "whatever it costs her."

Midge was at Hamner's side. "Tell Johnny the truth!" she said to Sayles.

"Please pour me a drink," Sayles said. "This arm is killing me."

"Talk first!" Hamner said.

Sayles gritted his teeth. "I — I had a gambling house in Las Vegas. Young Roper came there. Lost his shirt. He couldn't pay. Fresh college kid — thought I'd teach him a lesson. I had a couple of my boys threaten him good. I gave him a week to pay. If he hadn't — well, I was just trying to scare him."

"Never mind that," Hamner said.

"Then I heard — grapevine talk — he had been bribed to throw the championship game. I had money on that game. Plenty of it. I went to see him. Sue was with me."

"You had to drag her into it!" Hamner said.

"Tell Johnny how that happened," Midge said.

Sayles looked at Johnny. "You see, long ago, before Sue won the beauty contest that took her to Hollywood, she and I had been married."

Hamner made a groaning sound, but he didn't move.

"It didn't work out and we were divorced," Sayles said. "It was all friendly enough. Then Sue fell in love with Hamner and she came to my gambling place to beg me never to mention our marriage. She was afraid that if Hamner found out that she was a divorcee he wouldn't want to marry her. I told her I would keep quiet about it and I offered to drive her back to Los Angeles. On the way I planned to see Roper. I didn't expect trouble. If I had, I wouldn't have taken Sue with me. We went up to Roper's hotel room. Roper was a little crazy — caught between two fires. Me — and the guys he'd sold out to. He took a swing at me and I let him have it — knocked him down. He hit his head on the corner of a table as he fell."

"All an accident!" Hamner said bitterly.

"He was dead," Sayles said. "I was in a fix. I had a prison record. The police might not go for the accident theory. So I — I picked up his body and heaved it out the window."

Midge turned her face away, and Johnny could feel her fingers gripping his arm.

Sayles went on: "Sue and I ran out of the room — straight into someone standing outside the door. It was semi-dark there. A light bulb had blown. We couldn't see him clearly and I figured he couldn't see us. We barged past him and out of there." He paused. "Please, that whiskey—"

"When you've finished!" Hamner said.

"Sue was scared, naturally. We waited to see what would happen. Roper's death was reported a suicide. Whoever we'd bumped into in the hall hadn't reported it."

"You threatened Sue!" Hamner charged.

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"We seemed to be in the clear," Sayles said. "She agreed to keep still about it. She was afraid the scandal would wash her up with you. And I guess I did threaten her."

"You guess!"

"Then Sue married you," Sayles said. "Right after that she met Merritt, and he put the screws on her. He was the man we'd bumped into in the hall. He recognized her at once and wanted to know who the man with her that night was. You weren't big enough pickings for him, Hamner. Sue wouldn't tell him about me. She was afraid to. And she was afraid to tell you — just as she had been afraid to tell you that she'd been married to me. You were so violent about other men." Sayles's lips curled down at one corner. "For some reason she seemed to be in love with you."

"Keep talking!" Hamner said.

"Merritt kept at Sue — and kept at her. Then, when you got here — here I was, and Merritt recognized me! He sent Sue to me, demanding a sum of money."

"So you killed him!"

"No!" Sayles said sharply.

"You killed him, and then these two rats came to you and tried to carry on the blackmail."

"Stop it, Hal!" Midge said.

"No — go on, Mr. Hamner," a voice said from the door. They turned, and saw Franks standing there with his assistant and a trooper. He came into the room. "Go on, Mr. Hamner, because whatever else Sayles may have done, he didn't kill Duke Merritt. His alibi is foolproof."

"These two were trying to get dough out of Sayles," Hamner said.

Johnny couldn't speak. That was what old Bob had been doing.

"Johnny!" It was a whisper from the old man.

Quickly Johnny knelt beside him. "Take it easy, Bob. The doctor's coming."

"Doesn't matter," the old man said. His voice was so low Johnny could scarcely hear him. "But — Mr. Franks is right. Sayles didn't kill the Duke." The eyelids closed over the pale-blue eyes. "I killed him, laddie."

After the doctor came they moved Bob onto the bed in Sayles's room. The doctor said he shouldn't talk, but the old man insisted. Johnny sat beside him, numb, unable to believe what he heard. Midge stood behind Johnny, her hand on his shoulder. Franks, and the assistant with the yellow pad, stood on the other side of the bed.

"I never knew — never dreamed," the old man said. "After we got here — heard him — 'So he's here,' he told her — Mrs. Hamner. 'You'll go to him — you'll get the money — or you'll both go to jail for murder.' I heard this — from the Duke — my own Duke!"

He closed his eyes and they thought he wasn't going on, but in a moment or two his lips moved again. "The way he talked — the way she talked — I knew he'd been using his reputation, his name, the game of golf, to

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cover — what he really did. Blackmail. I — I brought him up. I — I thought he was all the things I'd ever dreamed of being, myself. I — I had to have it out with him, and I thought — if it's true — I'll kill him." He moistened his lips.

"I went in the pro shop — half dark. Took a club out of a bag — pure chance it belonged to Midge — pure chance. I went out to him. I — I faced him with it. He laughed at me. He asked me — where I thought all the money had been coming from. He said — I was an old fool. He bent down to put his club back in his bag, and — I killed him."

"Bob," Johnny said. "Bob!"

"Meant to give myself up," the old man said. "Then I realized — there was another murderer around. I didn't know his name. 'He' was all the Duke said to Mrs. Hamner. 'He's here.' Not someone who'd been traveling with us. I had to find out who — and prove it. Then — I saw Mrs. Hamner with Sayles — out there — when the police came. I wondered. One way to find out." He turned his eyes to Johnny. "I'm sorry I had to let you in for it, lad. I — I had to have a witness. I pretended I knew — asked him for money — and he broke, as I knew he would if he was guilty."

No one spoke. The old man looked at Johnny.

"It's a great game, lad. A game to be proud of. You have it in you to be — all the things I dreamed the Duke had been. A fine player, a fine competitor, a fine gentleman. I — I'd like to think I was a part of it, lad." His lips moved in a faint smile. "That putt out there today was a man's putt. You'll go on. You'll play tomorrow — in spite of all this. Promise me, laddie — you're all there is left to me."

"He's got to rest," the doctor said. "He's got to rest if he's to have any chance."

Chance for what? Johnny asked himself. Chance to die for killing a heel. As they walked into the next room he heard Hamner talking to Franks:

"What's going to happen to Sue?"

"She'll be the State's witness against Sayles. She was forced into the situation and kept silent against her will. It will be all right, Hamner."

All right for the Hamners. Johnny's throat ached. Then he felt a hand on his, cool and reassuring.

"You're not alone, Johnny dear," Midge said.

The cool hand lifted and touched his cheek. "The Duke you loved never existed, Johnny, so you've lost nothing. Old Bob is all you ever dreamed of, wrong as he was. And I — well, have you forgotten that I own you?"

He turned to look at her.

"I bought you in the Calcutta," she said, "not because you have a fine golf record. Just that would have been a poor investment. I bought you because you've got the heart to go with it. So — so I guess I'm stuck with you — laddie!"

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

"When Are People Going to Learn?" is John F. Suter's second prize-winning story in two years — you will remember his fine nostalgic reminiscence, "A Break in the Film," in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. The new prize-winner represents a great advance in the author's literary aims and in his selection of material. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the story is its editorial history.

When Mr. Suter's agent first submitted the story, Ye High and Mighty Editors read it carefully, considered it even more carefully, and finally decided to reject Mr. Suter's attempt to build a story around a really important theme. We were aware that the story had decidedly good points but it seemed to us, after that first reading, that the cons outweighed the pros. And so the story went back to our Managing Editor, with instructions to return the manuscript to the author's literary agent.

But our Managing Editor, Robert P. Mills (God bless him), did not merely shrug at our decision. He sent the story back, as instructed, but he also made a plea for serious reconsideration of the story's larger merits; and Mr. Mills's plea was so impassioned, and his arguments so convincing, that we asked him to recall the manuscript (a very rare occurrence, indeed). Well, we reread Mr. Suter's story, and changed our High and Mighty minds.

"When Are People Going to Learn?" (and surely the title has a double meaning for us now) owes its publication almost entirely to Mr. Mills's perception and persistence. We think most of you will be on Mr. Mills's side.

WHEN ARE PEOPLE GOING TO LEARN?

by JOHN F. SUTER

THE MURDER, BRUTAL AND SHOCKING though it was, seemed to be simple and straightforward. Harry Cooper and Dave Floyd went downtown on a warm evening in May, looking for Patrolman Jack McCoy. It should have been time wasted, for Patrolman Joe McCue was the man they really wanted, but they did not know that. A week earlier, McCue

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had given testimony which had sent their buddy, Jim Turner, to the State Pen for ten years. Neither Cooper nor Floyd was long on either brains or temper, and in a few days' time they had fumbled McCue's name. When an acquaintance (who was unaware of the purpose behind the question) told Floyd that he must have in mind Jack McCoy, whose beat was on the fringe of downtown, it was good enough.

Half a block from Main Street, McCoy was strolling along with little to occupy his attention. It was five minutes before 11, and the next fifteen minutes would see crowds of people on the street when the various movies closed. He gave little notice to the two six-foot men in dirty T-shirts and blue jeans who approached him. He was five feet eleven, himself, and an ex-infantryman. Besides, these two did not seem drunk or disorderly.

When Cooper and Floyd came even with McCoy, they stopped. Cooper asked McCoy if he was Jack McCoy. When the patrolman admitted it, they moved in. Cooper landed a punch on the left ear of McCoy which threw him off balance. Floyd stepped in and jerked McCoy's gun from its holster and threw it as far as he could down the street. McCoy swung his nightstick at Cooper, but Floyd sidestepped, closed in, and wrenched the club away from him. It joined the gun, far down the gutter.

As both Cooper and Floyd moved in, the first of the movie-goers began to appear. McCoy's attackers hit him several hard, vicious blows which doubled the cop in agony. Then Floyd, realizing that help might arrive for McCoy, tripped him and stepped back to leave the field to Cooper. A crowd gathered quickly.

Before the horrified, fascinated eyes of twenty-two persons, Harry Cooper beat Patrolman Jack McCoy nearly to death. It was revolting to watch. Although most of the spectators were men, nobody came to McCoy's help. Floyd had taken off his belt, a two-inch wide piece of leather, looped it around his hand, and stood there swinging the massive bronze buckle in front of the crowd's noses as they watched the beating. He said nothing: his intention was obvious.

Inevitably, the word got to the police. In a few minutes two patrol cars arrived. Surprisingly, neither Cooper nor Floyd offered much resistance, and they both were placed under arrest without further incident. It appeared that their rage had spent itself in the fight. An ambulance came for McCoy very soon after that. He was rushed to the hospital, but he died of internal injuries an hour later.

With Cooper and Floyd under lock and key, and so many witnesses, it seemed simple and straightforward. It was only after a number of statements made by witnesses were read that something else became apparent . . .

In a worn and grimly neutral office in City Hall, Detective-Lieuten-

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ant Walter Dean stood looking out of his window, waiting. His broad back was turned to his secretary, Louise Moran. He was talking to fill in time.

"City's sixty-some thousand now, and not standing still. All this beef about juvenile delinquency and wanting us to read the riot act to parents. That's been done. Read the riot act to *every* adult would be more like it. Kids pay more attention to other adults than they do to their parents. When are people going to learn?"

The inter-com hummed and said, "Mr. Emery is here."

Dean stepped quickly to the desk and flipped a switch.

"Send him in."

He nodded to Louise. She moved to her own desk in the corner and sat down at the typewriter with the noiseless keys.

The door opened.

The man in the doorway was about average height and weight. His most noticeable features were a long, straight nose and small, flat ears. His eyes and hair were brown and unexceptional. His forehead was already lightly creased, although he seemed to be only in his middle thirties.

Dean extended a hand.

"Mr. Emery. Glad you came down. You met Mrs. Moran the other time, I believe."

Louise Moran's poker face relaxed briefly into a smile, then went back to the strict neutrality which fifteen years of police experience had taught her.

Emery looked hesitant.

Dean retired behind his desk and waved to a chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Emery."

Both men sat, and began studying each other, Emery warily, Dean shrewdly. Dean leaned back.

"You're wondering what this is all about, I take it, Mr. Emery."

"Well, naturally — and since I have to take time off from work —"

"It's this McCoy affair, as you may have guessed. We need another statement from you."

Emery's brown eyes showed bewilderment.

"I've already told everything I know. I signed one statement, only yesterday. Don't you have that?"

Dean stroked his prematurely bald head absently.

"Yes, we have that statement, Mr. Emery. Right here on my desk. Trouble is, complications have come up, and we have to do some of this over again. So, if you don't mind, we'll do a run-through from another angle."

"Anything I can do —"

"Good. Now: I'll ask you questions, you answer, and Mrs. Moran will put it into proper form as we go along. Just answer to the best of your ability — and don't be surprised at anything I ask you."

Emery shifted uncomfortably. Dean pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and pushed it across the desk, following it with a desk lighter. Emery accepted the offer and lit up. He seemed more at ease.

"Very well. Now, Mr. Emery. Your full name?"

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"Herbert Martin Emery."

"Age?"

"Thirty-six."

"Height?"

"What's—"

"Please, Mr. Emery. Part of the information. Height?"

"Five feet nine."

"Weight?"

"One hundred and fifty-six. That's a month ago, but I stay pretty much the same."

"Close enough. Occupation?"

"Foreman for Jefferson and Robinson Roofing Company."

"That means you go out on most of their roofing jobs?"

"That's right."

"Indulge in any sports?"

"I golf a little. Swim a little when the weather's right. Bowl all season, during the winter."

"Very well. Where were you on the night of May 26?"

"At what hours?"

"Nine to 11:30."

Emery answered without hesitation.

"From 9 until 11 I was with my brother, Calvin, at the Strand Theater. It was a war picture, and our wives didn't want to see it, so we went together, Cal and me. After we left the show, we started toward Cal's car."

"It was parked on Sixth, just off Main. We saw this fight, these two thugs beating up Officer McCoy, and we went by to have a look. When it was all over, we went home, and Cal and I had a couple of beers in my kitchen while we told my wife, Virginia, and Cal's wife, Emily, all about it. And that's all."

Dean nodded.

"That's the general outline. Let's get the particulars. You say you saw the fight and went to watch it?"

"That's right."

"You were there all the time? You didn't leave?"

"Well, we didn't get there right when it started. They were trading a few when we noticed it. Then we saw the officer go down, and we went closer to see what happened."

"Did you leave the scene of the fight at any time?"

"You mean me? Or Cal? Or both of us?"

"I mean you, particularly. And your brother."

"Neither one of us left until the ambulance pulled away with poor Officer McCoy."

Dean looked at the ceiling, then at Emery.

"Did either one of you have a hand in this affair?"

Emery seemed shocked.

"No, sir! Besides, with that hulking redheaded thug standing there with that wicked-looking belt — no, we didn't mess into it. Let somebody else be a hero, not me."

"Did you see anybody else get into it?"

"Nobody but the three of them. Of course, some of it was pretty bad, like when McCoy was getting kicked. I looked away a lot of times, so maybe I missed something. You might ask

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Cal. Maybe he saw something I didn't."

Dean leaned forward.

"Did you *hear* anything?"

Emery's brows contracted in puzzlement.

"Hear anything? What, for instance?"

"Anything at all. You tell me."

Emery shook his head.

"Not a thing. Only the noises they made while fighting and Officer McCoy groaning."

"Did any of them say anything?"

"The two thugs were doing a lot of cursing. I couldn't repeat it. That kind of stuff doesn't stick with me, and I've forgotten it all."

"What about McCoy?"

"Well, he was groaning."

"Groaning. That's all? Just groaning?"

"That's all I remember. They hardly gave him a chance to do anything else."

Dean nodded. He reached down with his right hand, slid open a desk drawer, and pulled out an 8 x 10 glossy photograph. He handed it to Emery.

The picture showed the head and shoulders of a blond boy of nineteen or twenty. There was nothing extraordinary about the picture.

"Recognize this boy, Mr. Emery?"

Emery studied the picture and frowned.

"I've seen him, yes. He was watching the fight, too, I think."

Dean took back the picture.

"We have his statement that he was there. Any idea where he was standing in relation to you, Mr. Emery?"

"Let's see — Cal was on my left — why, yes, he was right beside me, on my right."

"Did you notice this boy doing anything, Mr. Emery?"

"No. No — he was just standing there, the way I was. He didn't get into it at all, as far as I know."

"Did he *try* to get into it at all?"

"No — well, now, wait a minute. Maybe he did. Yes — yes, I recall now, he did make some kind of a move, but the fellow who was beside *him* on the other side kept him from getting mixed up in it."

"Do you remember what the boy, or this man beside him, said?"

Emery shook his head.

"No. Not a thing. There was so much confusion, I wouldn't know."

"Anyone try to stop the fight?"

"No, sir, nobody. I guess everybody was afraid of that fellow with the belt."

"The man who kept the boy out of it — do you know him?"

Emery thought carefully. He pulled at his right ear.

"Seems I should. He's sorta familiar."

"Would his name be Ben Rowe, do you remember?"

"Ben Rowe! That's right! That's it!"

"You're sure?"

"Oh, yes. I used to be in grade school with Ben Rowe. That was a long time ago and I haven't seen

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much of him since. He's put on weight, and his hair's thinned. But that's who it was — Ben Rowe."

"All right. Let's get this established. This boy — his name's Tom Stone, by the way — tried to interfere in the fight, and Ben Rowe prevented him. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir. That's right."

"But you say you don't remember what was said?"

"I'm sorry. I don't."

"Very well. Did you see anyone else in the crowd you recognized?"

"Two or three people. There was Art Smith. And Lew Young. And Bessie Blair and Myrtle Fisher — they were together."

"Your brother, Calvin, what's his work?"

"Don't you have that down?"

"We have one statement he's made, and we're going to get another. But we'd like to have you tell us."

"Well, he's a rigger foreman, over at the mill."

"He works with heavy equipment, moving it around. Is that right?"

"That's most of it."

Dean glanced at a small desk clock.

"Excuse me a minute, Mr. Emery."

He pushed a lever on the inter-com.

"Reese."

"Yes, sir."

"Time for Stevens to make his call. Tell him, would you?"

"Right away."

Dean leaned back.

"Little job I almost let get away from me. Let's see, have we covered everything?"

He sat in thought for a moment.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Emery. Mrs. Moran, will you round this off and bring it over for Mr. Emery to sign?"

"Yes, sir."

Dean offered Emery another cigarette. It was refused. He took one, himself, lit it, and sat with one arm across the back of his chair.

"So it was a pretty bad fight, was it, Mr. Emery?"

"It was that. I don't think about it any more than I have to."

"I'm afraid you're going to have to think about it a lot, before this is over."

"Will they want me as a witness?"

"Possibly."

Emery grimaced.

"Some of that I don't *want* to remember."

"But you probably *will* remember it pretty well. I think you'd better get used to the idea."

Louise Moran got up from her typewriter and brought Dean two copies of Emery's statement. He handed the original to Emery, keeping the carbon himself. He glanced through it quickly.

"Take your time, Mr. Emery, and be sure to read it carefully. However, in brief, it tells us a few facts about yourself, then goes into your activities on the night of the fight, tells how you didn't get involved in it, the persons you recognized, and what you did or did not see or hear."

Emery grunted and read the paper carefully, stroking his nose with one

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finger as he read. Meantime, Dean looked through some other papers on his desk.

Finally Emery put the statement down.

"That looks to be what I told you. You want me to sign?"

"Please. Mrs. Moran will notarize your signature, where she has provided for it."

Dean handed Emery a pen, and he signed quickly and nervously. Dean gave the paper to Louise Moran. Standing beside the desk, she leaned over and carefully wrote in the necessary words and signature, finishing by impressing the paper with a large metal seal.

Dean took the statement and placed it on his desk in a folder with several other papers.

Emery got to his feet.

"You'll not be needing me for anything else, then? I ought to be getting back —"

Dean smiled humorlessly.

"Oh, yes, I will, Mr. Emery. This is only part of it. Please sit down."

Emery sat down again slowly, bewilderedly, as Dean took another paper from the folder.

"There is something you should hear, Mr. Emery. This is a sworn statement made by Mrs. Elizabeth Blair. I'll read you parts of it." He began to read, and his voice gradually gained bite as he read. "'The fight had already started when Mrs. Fisher and I came by. The officer was taking a terrible beating. In no time at all there was a crowd around, mostly men. Among them I saw Herbert Emery and his brother, Calvin. While the officer could still speak, he said to the crowd: '*I need help. I order you all to help me. Help me, and arrest these men.*' "

He looked up. "Do you remember that, Mr. Emery?"

Emery shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, it seems as though maybe —"

"I'll read some more. 'The officer almost begged a couple of times. Then he commanded. But nobody moved a muscle. That big man with the belt watched them, but not a one went to the policeman's aid. It was awful. Most of these men were able-bodied. I know, especially those Emerys. There was one light-haired boy who did try to break into it, and maybe if he had, some of the others might have joined in. But the man next to him — not Herbert Emery, but another one — grabbed him and said, *Stay out of it. Let them fight it out.* And before long it was too late.' That would have been Ben Rowe who did that, who said that, wouldn't it, Mr. Emery?"

Emery was looking at the floor.

"I guess so. I don't remember exactly, but I guess so. Yes, he did grab the kid."

Dean put the paper down and took up another.

"Statement by Mrs. Myrtle Fisher. Again, just parts of it. 'Saw Arthur Smith there . . . the Emerys, Herbert and Cal . . . a lot of average men, but none of them weaklings.

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Not physical weaklings, but certainly moral weaklings. It would only have taken two or three like the Emerys and some of the others to have stopped the fight . . . One man, just a boy, really, did try, but they wouldn't let him . . . At one time the policeman tried to sort of name the men in the crowd deputies, but nobody accepted the responsibility . . . I thought the human race had climbed higher than it seems to have done.' "

Emery said, without looking up, "She's just sticking by Bessie Blair. Both of 'em just a pair of lying gossips."

Dean raised his eyebrows. He replaced the Fisher statement and took up another.

"That so? Here's one from Tom Stone. That's the boy who's been mentioned. 'At first I thought it was just another fight. The one guy wasn't mixing in it. And I don't like cops too much, myself — always thought they picked on people a lot. But when I saw how it was, and how this cop tried to get help, and then when the kicking started, that was too much for me. I wanted to stop it. But when this guy in the crowd stopped me and I saw how the crowd was no help, I slipped off and called the cops. Only by then it was too late.' "

Emery looked up and fixed his eyes on the wall to the right of Dean. His voice shook a little when he spoke.

"Looks like Ben Rowe's in a spot, doesn't it?"

"Ben Rowe?" Dean snorted. "Yes — Ben Rowe — Arthur Smith — Lewis Young — James Cox — Terence Miller — Calvin Emery — *Herbert* Emery. You're all in a spot. Every one of you. And a damned tough one, at that."

"Cal — me —? Where do you get that? Just because Bessie Blair and Myrtle Fisher made some spite remarks, you can't say — why, Ben Rowe, maybe, is in trouble, yes. He wouldn't let that kid get into it, but the rest of us —"

"The rest of you didn't do a thing. I know. I have your sworn statement to that effect." Dean leaned forward. "I have your brother Calvin's, and he admits *he* did nothing. Lew Young admits the same thing. *And that's just the point, Mr. Emery.*"

Emery paled. "I'm a peaceful man, Lieutenant. I don't want to get mixed up in — things like that. I keep out of them. I want to see these two fellows punished, sure. I've given you two statements, and I didn't have to come forward at all. But I want to see those two thugs get all that's coming to them. Then you act like this, like I had a hand in this man's death. Like it was my fault."

Dean looked grim. "It *was* your fault. You *did* have a hand in it. McCoy, as an officer of the law, commanded you men to help him keep the peace. None of you men accepted the responsibility. So McCoy died."

"It's easy for you to talk, Dean. You weren't there with a six-foot thug in front of you swinging a murderous belt. You'd have done the same thing, unless you're a fool."

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Dean nodded. "If I'd been there alone, I might have done the same thing. But *you* weren't alone. There were several able-bodied men there. You and your brother, at least. Your own statement makes it clear that neither of you is broken-down, physically."

Emery said nothing. Dean went on, savagely.

"A year ago, a case a whole lot like this happened. The victim, a small man, was beaten and crippled for life by a 200-pounder twice his size. Sixteen people saw it happen, and nobody lifted a finger. *That* one made me sick, Emery, sick to my stomach!" He slammed his hand down on the desk. "But we couldn't do a thing, then, to the crowd, even though they were as guilty as the animal who did it! There's no law, you might be happy to know!"

Emery glanced at him triumphantly. "Then you're only bluffing on this one, too."

"Oh, no. Ohhh, no! This time, there *is* a law. McCoy, as an officer, commanded help. Your refusal lays you open to arrest and prosecution."

Emery managed a sneer.

"I've always heard it said that killing a cop would be the worst thing you could ever do, that the rest of 'em would get you, no matter what. You're out to rope in all you can get!"

"Yes, by God, I am! Not because McCoy was a cop, but because he gives us the only chance under law to pin the responsibility for this sort of thing where it belongs."

Dean got to his feet and put his knuckles on the desk.

"Ever think of yourself as an accomplice, Emery? As an abettor? As an accessory?"

Emery could not meet Dean's glare.

The Lieutenant flipped the switch on the inter-com.

"Reese, is Stevens back?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him in."

As Emery stared at the door, it opened, and a policeman in shirtsleeves came in. He carried a folded paper in his hand. He brought it to Dean, who glanced at it, then slapped it down on the desk.

"There, Mr. Upstanding Citizen Emery, is a warrant for your arrest. You'll have lots of company before we're through, too. The only thing I can say is — and it breaks my heart to say it — we can't name you an accomplice, or any of those other things. But we can get you for a misdemeanor. Six months in jail's the worst we can do. Aren't you glad?"

Emery stood up.

"I'll call my lawyer."

"You do that. You start worrying about the thousand dollars bail it'll take."

Emery's courage was obviously rising.

"It's political, Dean. Political. The City Hall crowd's doing this as a stunt, to show the public how alert they are cracking down on law-breakers. But you can't fool the public. They'll know."

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Dean scowled.

"Another windbag. Take him out, Stevens."

An icy anger settled on Emery's face. He said nothing more, but walked quickly to the door. Stevens followed him. The door shut behind them.

Dean sat down again. He looked older and infinitely more tired — within seconds. Louise Moran was now looking out of the window.

Without turning, she said, "It's a big order. It's never been attempted here before."

"I know. A political stunt, he said. Political suicide more like it."

"Secretaries don't have much trouble getting jobs nowadays. But how about police lieutenants?"

"Forget it." He lit a cigarette wearily. "I'll make you a bet, Louise. Emery'll get to trial, right enough. They can indict. But if he's convicted, I'll buy you a new hat. Every man on that jury will be just like Emery — and you just won't catch twelve average men convicting *themselves!*"

"You're so sure," she said softly. "Why try, then?"

"I don't know," he answered slowly. "Just can't help trying, I suppose."

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The late Helen Simpson was a versatile novelist, equally at home in the historical story and in fantasy. She was also a first-class detective writer whose books with Clemence Dane — ENTER SIR JOHN and the even more ingenious sequel, RE-ENTER SIR JOHN — are still remembered with respect and admiration. Now we bring you another facet of Helen Simpson's quite remarkable talent — a humorous spy story about a fastidious British spinster who has an extraordinary adventure during a visit to France. And if you find a certain — shall we say — indelicacy in the subject matter, we think you will agree with one critic who said of Helen Simpson's writing that she always revealed "grace, wit, and a sound story-telling instinct."

A POSTERIORI

by HELEN SIMPSON

AT ABOUT 1 O'CLOCK ON THE LAST night of her stay in Pontdidier-les-Dames, Miss Agatha Charters was awakened by indeterminate noises sounding almost in her room, and a medley of feet and voices in the street. It was not the first time this had happened. Pontdidier had belied the promise, made by an archdeacon, that she would find it a harbor of calm. The fact was, the town was too near a frontier, and too unsophisticated. When politicians in Paris began to roar of treason, Pontdidier believed them, and the Town Council set up a hue and cry for spies. Miss Charters had not failed to observe this nervousness, and to despise it a little, without ill-humor; but to be roused at one in the morning was a little too much, and she said so, in her firm French, to the landlady as she paid her bill the next day before leaving.

"*Je ne suis pas* sure *que je puis vous recommander à mes amis. Votre ville n'est pas tranquille du tout.*"

The landlady sank her head between her shoulders, then raised and swung it deplorably to and fro.

"Las' naight," said the landlady, practising English, which reckoned as a commercial asset, "it is a man escape from the police. A spy that makes photographies. They attrape him, but the photographies — gone! Nobody know."

"*Un espion!*" repeated Miss Charters coldly, as one who had heard that tale before. "*Espérons qu'il n'échapper à pas.*"

With that she walked upstairs to her room for a final inspection. Her hot-water bottle, as usual, had been forgotten in the deeps of the bed, and this she rescued thankfully. Going to the washstand to empty it, she set

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her foot on some round object and came to the floor with no inconsiderable bump. The object, obeying the impetus she had given it, rolled to rest against a chair-leg, and Miss Charters, turning to eye it with the natural resentment of one tricked by the inanimate, instantly recognized it as a spool of film.

Her mind, with a gibbon-like agility, leaped from the spool to the noises in the night; linked these with her own wide-open window, probably the only one in the entire façade of the hotel; and came to the conclusion that this spool had reached her floor by the hand of the suspected spy now in custody — flung as he fled. But there had been, her subconscious seemed to think, *two* noises in the room. She looked for another possible missile, and perceived, under the bed, a flat wallet of some kind. It was quite inaccessible, the bed's frame hung low, she had no umbrella to rake for it, and some vague memory of criminal procedure insisted that the police must always have first cut at a clue. It was her duty to go downstairs, display to the landlady the spool, which she had picked up instinctively, and ask that the authorities should be informed.

She set foot on the stairs, and even as she did so, halted. It became apparent that she would have to give her evidence in person, swear to the noise in the night and to the morning's discovery. This would involve missing her train, and its subsequent connection, with the expense of warning domestics and relatives by telegram. More sinister considerations succeeded these. The French were hysterical. They were spy-conscious. They would refuse to believe that she and the fleeing man were strangers. As an excuse for open windows, a plea of fresh air would not satisfy.

Halting on the stairs, she rehearsed these reasons for holding her tongue, and came to the conclusion that silence, with a subsequent letter from England, would meet the case. To roll the spool under the bed until it lay near the wallet, and so depart, would be the dignified and comparatively honest course of action. But the turmoil of the morning had let loose in Miss Charters's mind hordes of revolutionary desires, which now found a rallying ground in the fact that she had not, in her 40-odd years, had one single unusual experience. She had never held unquestioned sway as chief talker at any party; she had never come within hail of being the heroine of any incident more lively than the spoiling of a Guide picnic by rain. The spool of film, now safe in her bag, tempted her; to take it home as proof of the adventure, to hand it over in the end, perhaps, to somebody from the Foreign Office or Scotland Yard! She hesitated, and the revolutionaries in that instant had her conscience down. No word of any discovery found its way into her farewells.

At the station she became aware of two things. First, that she had twenty minutes to wait for her train; second,

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that amid the excitements of the morning she had omitted a visit to that retreat which old-fashioned foreign hotels leave innominate, indicating it only by two zeros on the door. She cast a prudish but searching eye about her. The word *Dames* beckoned; Miss Charters bought a newspaper and, apparently purposeless, drifted towards it.

The usual uncleanness greeted her, and to protect herself from unspeakable contacts, Miss Charters sacrificed a whole sheet of her newspaper. It was newly printed, the ink had a bloom to it. Miss Charters, accustomed at home to entrust to newspapers the defense of musquash against moth, vaguely supposed that it might prove, on this analogy, deterrent to germs. She emerged without delay, glanced to see that her baggage was safe, and paced up and down reading what remained of *Le Petit Journal*. There were fifteen minutes still to wait.

Seven or eight of these had passed in the atmosphere of unhurried makeshift that pervades all minor French stations when a commotion was heard outside, chattering of motorcycles, and shouting. Through the door marked *Sortie* three policemen in khaki and képis made a spectacular entrance, followed by a miraculous crowd apparently started up from the paving-stones. The three advanced upon Miss Charters, innocently staring, and required her, none too civilly, to accompany them.

"*Pourquoi?*" she inquired without heat. "*Je vais manquer mon* train."

They insisted, not politely; and their explanations, half inarticulate, contained a repetition of the word *portefeuille*. At once Miss Charters understood; the wallet had been found. (Who would have thought the French swept so promptly under beds?) She must give her account of the whole matter, miss her connection, telegraph her relations. Bells and signals announced the train to be nearly due; with a brief click of the tongue she summoned resolution for a last attempt at escape.

"*Je suis anglaise*," she announced. "*Mon passeport est en ordre. Voulez-vouz voir?*"

She opened her bag, and immediately, with a swift fatal motion, made to shut it. On top, surmounting the handkerchief, the eau-de-Cologne, the passport, lay the damning red spool, so hurriedly, so madly crammed in. The foremost policeman saw it as soon as she did. He gave a "Ha!" of triumph, and snatched the bag away from her. His two companions fell in at her side, the crowd murmured and eddied like a stream swollen by flood. As she was marched from the station, out of the corner of an eye she saw the train come in; and as they entered the Grande Rue she heard the chuff and chug of its departure. Hope gone, she could give undivided attention to her plight.

It became evident, from the manner of the policemen, and from the fact that she was taken to the Hotel de Ville, that matters were serious. She made one attempt to get her bag;

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certain necessary words were lacking in the formula of defense she was composing, and the bag contained a pocket dictionary. Her request was denied. A cynical-looking man at a large desk — mayor? magistrate? — fanned away her protests with both hands and listened to the policeman. So did Miss Charters, and was able to gather from his evidence that the wallet found in her room contained papers and calculations to do with the aerodrome near by. Could anything be more unlucky? The one genuine spy who had ever frequented Pontdidier-les-Dames must needs throw his ill-gotten information into her bedroom!

The functionary asked at last what she had to say. She replied with the truth; and despite a vocabulary eked out with "*vous savez*" told her story well. The functionary noted her explanation without comment, and having done so, asked the inevitable, the unanswerable questions.

"You found these objects at 10:45 this morning. Why did you not immediately inform the police? You insist that they have nothing to do with you. Yet you were actually attempting to carry out of this country one of the objects. How do you account for these facts?"

Miss Charters accounted for them by a recital, perfectly true, of her desire to shine at tea parties. It sounded odd as she told it: but she had some notion that the French were a nation of psychologists, also that, being foreign, they were gullible, and sympathetic to women in distress. The cynical man listened, and when her last appeal went down in a welter of failing syntax, considered a while, then spoke:

"I regret, mademoiselle. All this is not quite satisfactory. You must be searched."

The French she had learned at her governess's knee had not included the word he employed, and it was without any real understanding of his intention that she accompanied a woman in black, who suddenly appeared at her side, looking scimitars. They progressed together, a policeman at the other elbow, to a small room smelling of mice. The policeman shut the door on them; the woman in black ejaculated a brief command; and Miss Charters, horrified, found that she was expected to strip.

In her early youth Miss Charters's most favored day-dream had included a full-dress martyrdom, painful but effective, with subsequent conversions. She now learned that it is easier to endure pain than indignity, and amid all the throbbing which apprehension and shame had set up in her temples, one thought lorded it: the recollection that she had not, in view of the dirty train journey, put on clean underclothes that morning.

The woman in black lifted her hands from her hips as if to help with the disrobing; there was a shuffle outside the door as though the policeman might be turning to come in. With a slight scream, Miss Charters began to unbutton, unhook, unlace her various

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garments; as they dropped, the woman in black explored them knowingly, with fingers as active as those of a tricoteuse. At last Miss Charters stood revealed, conscious of innocence, but finding it a poor defense, and ready to exchange the lightest of consciences for the lightest of summer vests.

The woman in black was thorough. She held stockings up to the light, pinched corsets; at last, satisfied, she cast an eye over the shrinking person of Miss Charters, twirling her slowly about. Now the words of dismissal should have come. Instead, at her back Miss Charters heard a gasp. There was an instant's silence; then the one word, ominous: "*Enfin!*"

The woman in black ran to the door and shouted through it. Miss Charters heard excitement in the policeman's answering voice, and his boots clattered off down the corridor, running. Her imagination strove, and was bested. Why? What? The woman in black, with a grin lineally descended from '93, informed her.

"And now, my beauty, we'll see what the pretty message is that's written on mademoiselle's sit-upon!"

The next few moments were nightmare at its height, when the sleeper knows his dream for what it is, knows he must escape from it, and still must abide the capricious hour of waking. An assistant in blue was vouchsafed to the woman in black. One deciphered such letters as were visible, the other took them down, pesting against the artfulness of spies who printed their messages backwards. In deference to Miss Charters's age and passport some decency was observed. Policemen waited outside the half-open door; there was much noise, but no threatening. The women heard her explanation (conjectural) of their discovery without conviction and did not even trouble to write it down.

At last the message was transcribed. The woman in blue compassionately gave Miss Charters back her clothes, a gesture countered by the woman in black, who refused to allow her to sit down lest the precious impression be blurred. With a policeman at her elbow and the two searchers at her back, her cheek-bones pink, and beset by a feeling that this pinkness ran through to her skeleton, Miss Charters once more faced the functionary across his table. The transcription was handed to him. He considered it, first through a magnifying glass, then with the aid of a mirror. The policeman, the two searchers, craned forward to know the fate of France, thus by a freak of Fortune thrust into their hands.

"*Et maintenant,*" they read in capital letters, "*j'ai du cœur au travail, grace aux PILULES PINK.*"

The functionary's eyes appeared to project. He stared at Miss Charters, at the searchers; with a start, at his own daily paper lying folded, with his gloves upon it. He tore it open, seeking. Page 7 rewarded him. *Maladies des Femmes*, said the headline; underneath, the very words that had been deciphered with such pains, accom-

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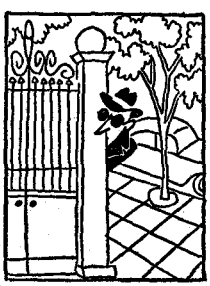
panying an illustration of a cheerful young woman, whose outline appeared in transfer not unlike the map of a town. Silently he compared; his glass was busy. At last he looked up, and Miss Charters, meeting his eye, perceived something like comprehension in his glance, a kind of gloating, a difficult witholding of laughter — "Rabelaisian" was the word which shot across her mind like a falling star. It was a hard glance to face, but all Englishness and spunk had not been slain in Miss Charters by the indignities chance had obliged her to suffer. She had one magnificent last word:

"*Je rapporterai le* W.C. *de la gare aux autorités sanitaires!*"

It was the best she could do. The larger threat which at first inflamed her mind, of complaints to the Ambassador in Paris, of redress and public apologies, would not do; both she and the Rabelaisian knew why. She could never, to any person, at any time, confide the truth of an experience so appalling. So far as vicarage conversation went, the thing was out of the question. Hateful irony! Something, after 40-odd years, had happened to her, and it had happened in such a manner that mere decency must strike her mute. In the words of a ceremony she had often in younger days read over fondly, she must, however difficult, hereafter forever hold her peace.

Miss Agatha Charters held it. The relations who welcomed her a day later were of opinion that her holiday in France had not done her much good. They found her quiet, and discovered that what she wanted was to be taken out of herself. So they arranged little gaieties, at which Miss Charters listened silently, now and then pinching in her lips, to travelers' tales of those who had been seeing life in London and by the sea.

"But then," as a relative remarked, "poor Aggie never did have much to say for herself."



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In his excellent biography of Jack London — SAILOR ON HORSEBACK, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1938 — Irving Stone made an acutely perceptive statement about Jack London's career as a Klondike gold miner: ". . . yet he who had never mined an ounce of gold in Alaska was to make more money out of the gold rush than any sourdough who staked a claim on Bonanza Creek."

Yes, that was true; but one of the fatal secrets of Jack London's life was that when "he was earning $75,000 a year from his writing, he was spending $100,000. Everything he owned was heavily mortgaged, including his future."

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THE UNEXPECTED

by JACK LONDON

EDITH WHITTLESEY WAS BORN IN A rural district of England, where life proceeds by rule of thumb and the unexpected is so very unexpected that when it happens it is looked upon as an immorality.

She went into service early, and while yet a young woman, by rule-of-thumb progression, she became a lady's maid. At the age of 25, she accompanied her mistress on a bit of travel to the United States. In Chicago, while her mistress saw one side of social life, Edith Whittlesey saw another side; and when she left her lady's service and became Edith Nelson, she betrayed, perhaps faintly, her ability to grapple with the unexpected and to master it.

Hans Nelson, immigrant, Swede by birth and carpenter by occupation, had in him that Teutonic unrest that drives the race ever westward on its great adventure. He was a large-muscled, stolid sort of a man, in whom little imagination was coupled with immense initiative, and who possessed loyalty and affection as sturdy as his own strength.

"When I have worked hard and

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THE LOVE OF LIFE AND OTHER STORIES

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saved me some money, I will go to Colorado," he had told Edith on the day after their wedding. A year later they were in Colorado, where Hans Nelson saw his first mining and caught the mining-fever himself. His prospecting led him through the Dakotas, Idaho, and eastern Oregon, and on into the mountains of British Columbia.

In camp and on trail, Edith Nelson was always with him, sharing his luck, his hardship, and his toil. The short step of the house-reared woman she exchanged for the long stride of the mountaineer. She, who had never cooked in her life, learned to make bread without the mediation of hops, yeast, or baking-powder, and to bake bread, top and bottom, in a frying-pan before an open fire. And when the last cup of flour was gone and the last rind of bacon, she was able to rise to the occasion, and of moccasins and the softer-tanned bits of leather in the outfit to make a grub-stake substitute that somehow held a man's soul in his body and enabled him to stagger on. She learned to pack a horse as well as a man, — a task to break the heart and the pride of any city-dweller, and she knew how to throw the hitch best suited for any particular kind of pack. Also, she could build a fire of wet wood in a downpour of rain and not lose her temper. In short, in all its guises she mastered the unexpected. But the Great Unexpected was yet to come into her life and put its test upon her.

The gold-seeking tide was flooding northward into Alaska, and it was inevitable that Hans Nelson and his wife should be caught up by the stream and swept toward the Klondike. The fall of 1897 found them at Dyea, but without the money to carry an outfit across Chilcoot Pass and float it down to Dawson. So Hans Nelson worked at his trade that winter and helped rear the mushrooming outfitting-town of Skaguay.

He was on the edge of things, and throughout the winter he heard all Alaska calling to him. Latuya Bay called loudest, so that the summer of 1898 found him and his wife threading the mazes of the broken coast-line in 70-foot Siwash canoes. With them were Indians, also three other men. The Indians landed them and their supplies in a lonely bight of land a hundred miles or so beyond Latuya Bay, and returned to Skaguay; but the three other men remained, for they were members of the organized party. Each had put an equal share of capital into the outfitting, and the profits were to be divided equally. In that Edith Nelson undertook to cook for the outfit, a man's share was to be her portion.

First, spruce trees were cut down and a three-room cabin constructed. To keep this cabin was Edith Nelson's task. The task of the men was to search for gold, which they did; and to find gold, which they likewise did. It was not a startling find, merely a low-pay placer where long hours of severe toil earned each man between fifteen and twenty dollars a day. The

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brief Alaskan summer protracted itself beyond its usual length, and they took advantage of the opportunity, delaying their return to Skaguay to the last moment. And then it was too late. Arrangements had been made to accompany the several dozen local Indians on their fall trading trip down the coast. The Siwashes had waited on the white people until the eleventh hour, and then departed. There was no course left the party but to wait for chance transportation. In the meantime the claim was cleaned up and firewood stocked in.

The Indian summer had dreamed on and on when suddenly, with the sharpness of bugles, winter came. It came in a single night, and the miners awoke to howling wind, driving snow, and freezing water. Storm followed storm, and between the storms there was the silence, broken only by the boom of the surf on the desolate shore, where the salt spray rimmed the beach with frozen white.

All went well in the cabin. Their gold-dust had weighed up something like $8,000, and they could not but be contented. The men made snow-shoes, hunted fresh meat for the larder, and in the long evenings played endless games of whist and pedro. Now that the mining had ceased, Edith Nelson turned over the fire-building and the dish-washing to the men, while she darned their socks and mended their clothes.

There was no grumbling, no bickering, no petty quarreling in the little cabin, and they often congratulated one another on the general happiness of the party. Hans Nelson was stolid and easy-going, while Edith had long before won his unbounded admiration by her capacity for getting on with people. Harkey, a long lank Texan, was unusually friendly for one with a saturnine disposition, and, as long as his theory that gold grew was not challenged, was quite companionable. The fourth member of the party, Michael Dennin, contributed his Irish wit to the gayety of the cabin. He was a large powerful man, prone to sudden rushes of anger over little things, and of unfailing good-humor under the stress and strain of big things. The fifth and last member, Dutchy, was the willing butt of the party. He even went out of his way to raise a laugh at his own expense in order to keep things cheerful. No serious quarrel had ever vexed the serenity of the party; and, now that each had $1600 to show for a short summer's work, there reigned the contented spirit of prosperity.

And then the unexpected happened.

They had just sat down to the breakfast table. Though it was already 8 o'clock (late breakfasts had followed naturally upon cessation of the steady work at mining) a candle in the neck of a bottle lighted the meal. Edith and Hans sat at each end of the table. On one side, with their backs to the door, sat Harkey and Dutchy. The place on the other side was vacant. Dennin had not yet come in.

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Hans Nelson looked at the empty chair, shook his head slowly, and, with a ponderous attempt at humor, said: "Always is he first at the grub. It is very strange. Maybe he is sick."

"Where is Michael?" Edith asked.

"Got up a little ahead of us and went outside," Harkey answered.

Dutchy's face beamed mischievously. He pretended knowledge of Dennin's absence, and affected a mysterious air, while they clamored for information. Edith, after a peep into the men's bunkroom, returned to the table. Hans looked at her, and she shook her head.

"He was never late at meal-time before," she remarked.

"I cannot understand," said Hans. "Always has he the great appetite like the horse."

"It is too bad," Dutchy said, with a sad shake of his head.

They were beginning to make merry over their comrade's absence.

"It is a great pity!" Dutchy volunteered.

"What?" they demanded in chorus.

"Poor Michael," was the mournful reply.

"Well, what's wrong with Michael?" Harkey asked.

"He is not hungry no more," wailed Dutchy. "He has lost der appetite. He do not like der grub."

"Not from the way he pitches into it up to his ears," remarked Harkey.

"He does dot shust to be politeful to Mrs. Nelson," was Dutchy's quick retort. "Why is he not here? Pecause he haf gone out. Why haf he gone out? For der defelopment of der appetite. How does he defelop der appetite? He walks barefoots in der snow. He is chasing der appetite. Shust you open der door und you will see his barefoots in der snow. No, you will not see der appetite. Dot is shust his trouble. When he sees der appetite he will catch it und come to preakfast."

They burst into loud laughter at Dutchy's nonsense. The sound had scarcely died away when the door opened and Dennin came in. All turned to look at him. He was carrying a shot-gun. Even as they looked, he lifted it to his shoulder and fired twice. At the first shot Dutchy sank upon the table, overturning his mug of coffee, his yellow mop of hair dabbling in his plate of mush. His forehead, which pressed upon the near edge of the plate, tilted the plate up against his hair at an angle of 45 degrees. Harkey was in the air, in his spring to his feet, at the second shot, and he pitched face down upon the floor, his "My God!" gurgling and dying in his throat.

It was the unexpected.

Hans and Edith were stunned. They sat at the table with bodies tense, their eyes fixed in a fascinated gaze upon the murderer. Dimly they saw him through the smoke of the powder, and in the silence nothing was to be heard save the drip-drip of Dutchy's spilled coffee on the floor. Dennin threw open the breech of the shot-gun, ejecting the empty shells. Holding the gun with one hand, he

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reached with the other into his pocket for fresh shells.

He was thrusting the shells into the gun when Edith Nelson was aroused to action. It was patent that he intended to kill Hans and her. For a space of possibly three seconds of time she had been dazed and paralyzed by the horrible and inconceivable form in which the unexpected had made its appearance. Then she rose to it and grappled with it. She grappled with it concretely, making a cat-like leap for the murderer and gripping his neck-cloth with both her hands. The impact of her body sent him stumbling backward several steps. He tried to shake her loose and still retain his hold on the gun. This was awkward, for her firm body had become like a cat's. She threw herself to one side, and with her grip at his throat nearly jerked him to the floor. He straightened himself and whirled swiftly. Still faithful to her hold, her body followed the circle of his whirl so that her feet left the floor, and she swung through the air fastened to his throat by her hands. The whirl culminated in a collision with a chair, and the man and woman crashed to the floor in a wild struggling that extended itself across half the length of the room.

Hans Nelson was half a second behind his wife in rising to the unexpected. His nerve and mental processes were slower than hers. His was the grosser organism, and it had taken him half a second longer to perceive, and determine, and proceed to do. She had already flown at Dennin and gripped his throat when Hans sprang to his feet. But her coolness was not his. He was in a blind fury, a berserker rage. At the instant he sprang from his chair his mouth opened and there issued forth a sound that was half roar, half bellow. The whirl of the two bodies had already started, and still roaring, or bellowing, he pursued this whirl down the room, overtaking it when it fell to the floor.

Hans hurled himself upon the prostrate man, striking madly with his fists. They were sledge-like blows, and when Edith felt Dennin's body relax she loosed her grip and rolled clear. She lay on the floor, panting and watching. The fury of blows continued to rain down. Dennin did not seem to mind the blows. He did not even move. Then it dawned upon her that he was unconscious. She cried out to Hans to stop. She cried out again. But he paid no heed to her voice. She caught him by the arm, but her clinging to it merely impeded his effort.

It was no reasoned impulse that stirred her to do what she then did. Nor was it a sense of pity, nor obedience to the "Thou shalt not" of religion. Rather was it some sense of law, an ethic of her race and early environment, that compelled her to interpose her body between her husband and the helpless murderer. It was not until Hans knew he was striking his wife that he ceased. He allowed himself to be shoved away by her in much the same way that a

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ferocious but obedient dog allows itself to be shoved away by its master. Deep in his throat, in an animal-like way, Hans's rage still rumbled, and several times he made as though to spring back upon his prey and was only prevented by the woman's swiftly interposed body.

Back and farther back Edith shoved her husband. She had never seen him in such a condition, and she was more frightened of him than she had been of Dennin in the thick of the struggle. She could not believe that this raging beast was her Hans, and with a shock she became suddenly aware of a shrinking, instinctive fear that he might snap her hand in his teeth like any wild animal. For some seconds, unwilling to hurt her, yet dogged in his desire to return to the attack, Hans dodged back and forth. But she resolutely dodged with him, until the first glimmerings of reason returned and he gave over.

Both crawled to their feet. Hans staggered back against the wall, where he leaned, his face working, in his throat the deep and continuous rumble that died away with the seconds and at last ceased. Edith stood in the middle of the floor, panting and gasping, her whole body trembling violently.

Hans looked at nothing, but Edith's eyes wandered wildly from detail to detail of what had taken place. Dennin lay without movement. The overturned chair, hurled onward in the mad whirl, lay near him. Partly under him lay the shot-gun, still broken open at the breech. Spilling out of his right hand were the two cartridges which he had failed to put into the gun and which he had clutched until consciousness left him. Harkey lay on the floor, face downward, where he had fallen; while Dutchy rested forward on the table, his yellow mop of hair buried in his mush-plate, the plate still tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees. This tilted plate fascinated her. Why did it not fall down? It was ridiculous. It was not in the nature of things for a mush-plate to up-end itself on the table, even if a man or so had been killed.

She glanced back at Dennin, but her eyes returned to the tilted plate. It was so ridiculous! She felt a hysterical impulse to laugh. Then she noticed the silence, and forgot the plate in a desire for something to happen. The monotonous drip of the coffee from the table to the floor merely emphasized the silence. Why did not Hans do something? say something? She looked at him and was about to speak, when she discovered that her tongue refused. There was a peculiar ache in her throat, and her mouth was dry and furry. She could only look at Hans, who, in turn, looked at her.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a sharp, metallic clang. She screamed, jerking her eyes back to the table. The plate had fallen down. Hans sighed as though awakening from sleep. The clang of the plate had aroused them to life in a new world. The cabin epitomized the new world in which they must thenceforth live

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and move. The old cabin was gone forever. The horizon of life was totally new and unfamiliar. The unexpected had swept its wizardry over the face of things, changing the perspective, juggling values, and shuffling the real and the unreal into perplexing confusion.

"My God, Hans!" was Edith's first speech.

He did not answer, but stared at her with horror. Slowly his eyes wandered over the room, for the first time taking in its details. Then he put on his cap and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Edith demanded, in an agony of apprehension.

His hand was on the door-knob, and he half turned as he answered, "To dig some graves."

"Don't leave me, Hans, with —" her eyes swept the room — "with this."

"The graves must be dug sometime," he said.

"But you do not know how many," she objected desperately. She noted his indecision, and added, "Besides, I'll go with you and help."

Hans stepped back to the table and mechanically snuffed the candle. Then between them they made the examination. Both Harkey and Dutchy were dead — frightfully dead, because of the close range of the shot-gun. Hans refused to go near Dennin, and Edith was forced to conduct this portion of the investigation by herself.

"He isn't dead," she called to Hans.

He walked over and looked down at the murderer.

"What did you say?" Edith demanded, having caught the rumble of inarticulate speech in her husband's throat.

"I said it was a damn shame that he isn't dead," came the reply.

Edith was bending over the body.

"Leave him alone," Hans commanded harshly, in a strange voice.

She looked at him in sudden alarm. He had picked up the shot-gun dropped by Dennin and was thrusting in the shells.

"What are you going to do?" she cried, rising swiftly from her bending position.

Hans did not answer, but she saw the shot-gun going to his shoulder. She grasped the muzzle with her hand and threw it up.

"Leave me alone!" he cried hoarsely.

He tried to jerk the weapon away from her, but she came in closer and clung to him.

"Hans! Hans! Wake up!" she cried. "Don't be crazy!"

"He killed Dutchy and Harkey!" was her husband's reply, "and I am going to kill him."

"But that is wrong," she objected. "There is the law."

He sneered his incredulity of the law's potency in such a region, but he merely iterated, dispassionately, doggedly, "He killed Dutchy and Harkey."

Long she argued it with him. She could not escape from her childhood training nor from the blood that was in her. The heritage of law was hers,

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and right conduct, to her, was the fulfilment of the law. She could see no other righteous course to pursue. Hans's taking the law in his own hands was no more justifiable than Dennin's deed. Two wrongs did not make a right, she contended, and there was only one way to punish Dennin, and that was the legal way arranged by society. At last Hans gave in to her.

"All right," he said. "Have it your own way. And tomorrow or next day look to see him kill you and me."

She shook her head and held out her hand for the shot-gun. He started to hand it to her, then hesitated.

"Better let me shoot him," he pleaded.

Again she shook her head, and again he started to pass her the gun, when the door opened and an Indian, without knocking, came in. A blast of wind and flurry of snow came in with him. They turned and faced him, Hans still holding the shot-gun. The intruder took in the scene without a quiver. His eyes embraced the dead and wounded in a sweeping glance. No surprise showed in his face, not even curiosity. Harkey lay at his feet, but he took no notice. So far as he was concerned, Harkey's body did not exist.

"Much wind," the Indian remarked by way of salutation. "All well? Very well?"

Hans, still grasping the gun, felt sure that the Indian attributed to him the mangled corpses. He glanced appealingly at his wife.

"Good morning, Negook," she said, her voice betraying her effort. "No, not very well. Much trouble."

"Goodbye, I go now, much hurry," the Indian said; and without semblance of haste, with great deliberation, stepping clear of a red pool on the floor, he opened the door and went out.

The man and woman looked at each other.

"He thinks we did it," Hans gasped, "that I did it."

Edith was silent for a space. Then she said, briefly, in a businesslike way:

"Never mind what he thinks. That will come after. At present we have two graves to dig. But first of all, we've got to tie up Dennin so he can't escape."

Hans refused to touch Dennin. Edith lashed him securely, hand and foot. Then she and Hans went out into the snow. The ground was frozen. It was impervious to a blow of the pick. They first gathered wood, then scraped the snow away and on the frozen surface built a fire. When the fire had burned for an hour, several inches of dirt had thawed. This they shoveled out, and then built a fresh fire. Their descent into the earth progressed at the rate of two or three inches an hour.

It was hard and bitter work. The flurrying snow did not permit the fire to burn any too well, while the wind cut through their clothes and chilled their bodies. They held little conversation. The wind interfered with speech. Beyond wondering at

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what could have been Dennin's motive they remained silent, oppressed by the horror of the tragedy. At 1 o'clock, looking toward the cabin, Hans announced that he was hungry.

"No, not now, Hans," Edith answered. "I couldn't go back alone into that cabin the way it is, and cook a meal."

At 2 o'clock Hans volunteered to go with her; but she held him to his work, and 4 o'clock found the two graves completed. They were shallow, not more than two feet deep, but they would serve the purpose. Night had fallen. Hans got the sled, and the two dead men were dragged through the darkness and storm to their frozen sepulchre. The sled sank deep into the drifted snow and pulled hard. The man and the woman had eaten nothing since the previous day and were weak from hunger and exhaustion. They had not the strength to resist the wind, and at times its buffets hurled them off their feet. On several occasions the sled was overturned, and they were compelled to reload its somber freight. The last hundred feet to the graves was up a steep slope, and this they took on all fours, like sled-dogs, making legs of their arms and thrusting their hands into the snow. Even so, they were twice dragged backward by the weight of the sled, and slid and fell down the hill, the living and the dead, the haul-ropes and the sled, in ghastly entanglement.

"Tomorrow I will put up headboards with their names," Hans said, when the graves were filled in.

Edith was sobbing. A few broken sentences had been all she was capable of in the way of a funeral service, and now her husband was compelled to half-carry her back to the cabin.

Dennin was conscious. He had rolled over and over on the floor in vain efforts to free himself. He watched Hans and Edith with glittering eyes, but made no attempt to speak. Hans still refused to touch the murderer and sullenly watched Edith drag him across the floor to the men's bunk-room. But try as she would, she could not lift him from the floor into his bunk.

"Better let me shoot him, and we'll have no more trouble," Hans said.

Edith shook her head and bent again to her task. To her surprise the body rose easily, and she knew Hans had relented and was helping her. Then came the cleansing of the kitchen. But the floor still shrieked the tragedy, until Hans planed the surface of the stained wood away and with the shavings made a fire in the stove.

The days came and went. There was much darkness and silence, broken only by the storms and the thunder on the beach of the freezing surf. Hans was obedient to Edith's slightest order. All his splendid initiative had vanished. She had elected to deal with Dennin in her way, and so he left the whole matter in her hands.

The murderer was a constant men-

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ace. At all times there was the chance that he might free himself from his bonds, and they were compelled to guard him day and night. The man or the woman sat always beside him, holding the loaded shot-gun. At first Edith tried eight-hour watches, but the continuous strain was too great, and afterwards she and Hans relieved each other every four hours. As they had to sleep, and as the watches extended through the night, their whole waking time was expended in guarding Dennin. They had barely time left over for the preparation of meals and the getting of firewood.

Since Negook's inopportune visit, the Indians had avoided the cabin. Edith sent Hans to their cabins to get them to take Dennin down the coast in a canoe to the nearest white settlement or trading post, but the errand was fruitless. Then Edith went herself and interviewed Negook. He was head man of the little village, keenly aware of his responsibility, and he elucidated his policy thoroughly in few words.

"It is white man's trouble," he said, "not Siwash trouble. My people help you, then will it be Siwash trouble, too. When white man's trouble and Siwash trouble come together and make a trouble, it is a great trouble, beyond understanding and without end. Trouble no good. My people do no wrong. What for they help you and have trouble?"

So Edith Nelson went back to the terrible cabin with its endless alternating four-hour watches. Sometimes, when it was her turn and she sat by the prisoner, the loaded shot-gun in her lap, her eyes would close and she would doze. Always she aroused with a start, snatching up the gun and swiftly looking at him. These were distinct nervous shocks, and their effect was not good on her. Such was her fear of the man that, even though she were wide awake, if he moved under the bedclothes she could not repress the start and the quick reach for the gun.

She was preparing herself for a nervous breakdown, and she knew it. To add to the strain, she remained as close to the horror as on the first morning when the unexpected stalked into the cabin and took possession. In her daily ministrations upon the prisoner she was forced to grit her teeth and steel herself, body and spirit.

Hans was affected differently. He became obsessed by the idea that it was his duty to kill Dennin; and whenever he waited upon the bound man or watched by him, Edith was troubled by the fear that Hans would add another red entry to the cabin's record. Always he cursed Dennin savagely and handled him roughly. Hans tried to conceal his homicidal mania, and he would say to his wife: "By and by you will want me to kill him, and then I will not kill him. It would make me sick." But more than once, stealing into the room, when it was her watch off, she would catch the two men glaring ferociously at each other, wild animals the pair of

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them, in Hans's face the lust to kill, in Dennin's the fierceness and savagery of the cornered rat. "Hans!" she would cry, "wake up!" and he would come to a recollection of himself, startled and unrepentant.

So Hans became another factor in the problem the unexpected had given Edith Nelson to solve. At first it had been merely a question of right conduct in dealing with Dennin; and right conduct, as she conceived it, lay in keeping him a prisoner until he could be turned over for trial before a proper tribunal. But now entered Hans, and she saw that his sanity and his salvation were involved. Nor was she long in discovering that her own strength and endurance had become part of the problem. Her left arm had developed involuntary jerkings and twitchings. She spilled her food from her spoon, and could place no reliance in her afflicted arm. What if she broke down? And the vision she had of the possible future, when the cabin might contain only Dennin and Hans, was an added horror.

After the third day Dennin had begun to talk. His first question had been, "What are you going to do with me?" And this question he repeated many times a day. Always Edith replied that he would assuredly be dealt with according to law. In turn, she put a daily question to him: "Why did you do it?" To this he never replied. But he received the question with outbursts of anger, raging and straining at the rawhide that bound him and threatening her with what he would do when he got loose, which he said he was sure to do sooner or later. At such times she cocked both triggers of the gun, prepared to meet him with leaden death if he should burst loose, herself trembling and palpitating and dizzy from the tension and shock.

In time Dennin grew more tractable. He began to beg and plead to be released. He made wild promises. He would do them no harm. He would himself go down the coast and give himself up to the officers of the law. He would give them his share of the gold. He would go away into the heart of the wilderness and never again appear in civilization. His pleadings usually culminated in involuntary raving, until it seemed to her that he was passing into a fit; but always she shook her head and denied him the freedom for which he worked himself into a passion.

The weeks went by, and his weariness asserted itself more and more. "I am so tired, so tired," he would murmur, rolling his head back and forth on the pillow like a peevish child. At a later period he began to make impassioned pleas for death, to beg her to kill him, Hans to put him out of his misery.

The situation was fast becoming impossible. Though January had already come, months would have to elapse before any trading schooner was even likely to put into the bay. Also, they had not expected to winter in the cabin, and the food was running low; nor could Hans add to

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the supply by hunting. They were chained to the cabin by the necessity of guarding their prisoner.

Something must be done, and Edith knew it. She forced herself to go back into a reconsideration of the problem. She could not shake off the legacy of her race, the law that was of her blood. She knew that whatever she did she must do according to the law, and in the long hours of watching, the shot-gun on her knees, the murderer restless beside her and the storms thundering without, she made original sociological researches and worked out for herself the evolution of the law.

It came to her that the law was nothing more than the judgment and the will of any group of people. It mattered not how large was the group of people. There were little groups, she reasoned, like Switzerland, and there were big groups, like the United States. Also, it did not matter how small was the group of people. There might be only 10,000 people in a country, yet their collective judgment and will would be the law of that country. Why, then, could not 1000 people constitute such a group? she asked herself. And if 1000, why not 100? Why not 50? Why not five? Why not — *two?*

She was frightened at her own conclusion, and she talked it over with Hans. At first he could not comprehend; and then, when he did, he added convincing evidence. He spoke of miners' meetings, where all the men of a locality came together and made the law and executed it. There might be only ten or fifteen men altogether, he said, but the will of the majority became the law for the whole ten or fifteen, and whoever violated that will was punished.

Edith saw her way clear at last. Dennin must hang. Hans agreed with her. Between them they constituted the majority of this particular group. It was the group-will that Dennin should be hanged. In the execution of this will Edith strove earnestly to observe the customary forms, but the group was so small that Hans and she had to serve as witnesses, as jury, as judges — and as executioners. She formally charged Michael Dennin with the murder of Dutchy and Harkey, and the prisoner lay in his bunk and listened to the testimony, first of Hans, and then of Edith. He refused to plead guilty or not guilty, and he remained silent when she asked him if he had anything to say in his own defense. She and Hans, without leaving their seats, brought in the jury's verdict of guilty. Then, as judge, she imposed the sentence. Her voice shook, her eyelids twitched, her left arm jerked, but she carried it out.

"Michael Dennin, in three days' time you are to be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

Such was the sentence. The man breathed an unconscious sigh of relief, then laughed defiantly, and said, "Thin I'm thinkin' the damn bunk won't be achin' me back anny more, an' that's a consolation."

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With the passing of the sentence a feeling of relief seemed to communicate itself to all of them. Especially was it noticeable in Dennin. All sullenness and defiance disappeared, and he talked sociably with his captors, even with flashes of his old-time wit. Also, he found great satisfaction in Edith's reading to him from the Bible. She read from the New Testament, and he took keen interest in the prodigal son and the thief on the cross.

On the day preceding that set for the execution, when Edith asked her usual question, "Why did you do it?" Dennin answered, " 'Tis very simple. I was thinkin' —"

But she hushed him abruptly, asked him to wait, and hurried to Hans's bedside. It was his watch off, and he came out of his sleep, rubbing his eyes and grumbling.

"Go," she told him, "and bring up Negook and one other Indian. Michael's going to confess. Make them come. Take the rifle along and bring them up at the point of it if you have to."

Half an hour later Negook and his uncle, Hadikwan, were ushered into the death chamber. They came unwillingly, Hans with his rifle herding them along.

"Negook," Edith said, "there is to be no trouble for you and your people. Only is it for you to sit and do nothing but listen and understand."

Thus did Michael Dennin, under sentence of death, make public confession of his crime. As he talked, Edith wrote his story down, while the Indians listened, and Hans guarded the door for fear the witnesses might bolt.

He had not been home to the old country for fifteen years, Dennin explained, and it had always been his intention to return with plenty of money and make his old mother comfortable for the rest of her days.

"An' how was I to be doin' it on sixteen hundred?" he demanded. "What I was after wantin' was all the goold, the whole eight thousan'. Thin I cud go back in style. What ud be aisier, thinks I to myself, than to kill all iv yez, report it at Skaguay for an Indian-killin', an' thin pull out for Ireland? An' so I started in to kill all iv yez. But, as Harkey was fond of sayin', I cut out too large a chunk an' fell down on the swallowin' iv it. An' that's me confession. I did me duty to the devil, an' now, God willin', I'll do me duty to God."

"Negook and Hadikwan, you have heard the white man's words," Edith said to the Indians. "His words are here on this paper, and it is for you to make a sign, thus, on the paper, so that white men to come after will know that you have heard."

The two Siwashes put crosses opposite their names, received a summons to appear on the morrow with all their tribe for a further witnessing of things, and were allowed to go.

Dennin's hands were released long enough for him to sign the document. Then a silence fell in the room. Hans

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was restless, and Edith felt uncomfortable. Dennin lay on his back, staring straight up at the moss-chinked roof.

"An' now I'll do me duty to God," he murmured. He turned his head toward Edith. "Read to me," he said, "from the Book;" then added, with a glint of playfulness, "Mayhap 'twill help me to forget the bunk."

The day of the execution broke clear and cold. The thermometer was down to twenty-five below zero, and a chill wind was blowing which drove the frost through clothes and flesh to the bones. For the first time in many weeks Dennin stood upon his feet. His muscles had remained inactive so long that he could scarcely stand. He staggered and clutched Edith with his bound hands for support.

"Sure, an' it's dizzy I am," he laughed weakly.

A moment later he said, "An' it's glad I am that it's over with. That damn bunk would iv been the death iv me, I know."

When Edith put his fur cap on his head and proceeded to pull the flaps down over his ears, he laughed and said:

"What are you doin' that for?"

"It's freezing cold outside," she answered.

"An' in tin minutes' time what'll matter a frozen ear or so to poor Michael Dennin?" he asked.

She had nerved herself for the last ordeal; his remark shocked her to the reality of what was taking place.

"I'm sorry to be troublin' you with me foolish spache," the Irishman said regretfully. "I mint nothin' by it. 'Tis a great day for Michael Dennin, an' he's as gay as a lark."

He broke out in a merry whistle, which quickly became lugubrious and ceased.

"I'm wishin' there was a priest," he said wistfully; then added swiftly, "But Michael Dennin's too old a campaigner to miss the luxuries when he hits the trail."

He was so unused to walking that the wind outside nearly carried him off his feet. Edith and Hans supported him, while he cracked jokes and tried to keep them cheerful. He broke off once to arrange the forwarding of his share of the gold to his mother in Ireland.

They climbed a slight hill and came out into an open space among the trees. Here, circled solemnly about a barrel that stood on end in the snow, were Negook and Hadikwan, and all the Siwashes down to the babies and the dogs, come to see the way of the white man's law. Nearby was an open grave which Hans had burned into the frozen earth.

Dennin cast a practical eye over the preparations, noting the grave, the barrel, the thickness of the rope, and the diameter of the limb over which the rope was passed.

"Sure, an' I couldn't iv done better meself, Hans, if it'd been for you."

He laughed loudly at his own sally, but Hans's face was frozen into a sullen ghastliness. Hans was feeling very sick. He had not realized the

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enormousness of the task of putting a fellow-man out of the world.

Edith was filled with doubt as to whether she could hold herself together long enough to finish it. She felt incessant impulses to scream, to shriek, to collapse into the snow, to put her hands over her eyes and turn and run blindly away, into the forest, anywhere, but away. It was only by a supreme effort that she was able to keep upright and do what she had to do. And in the midst of it all she was grateful to Dennin for the way he helped her.

"Lind me a hand," he said to Hans, with whose assistance he managed to mount the barrel.

He bent over so that Edith could adjust the rope about his neck. Then he stood erect while Hans drew the rope taut across the overhead branch.

"Michael Dennin, have you anything to say?" Edith asked in a voice that shook in spite of her.

Dennin shuffled his feet on the barrel, looked down bashfully like a man making his maiden speech, and cleared his throat.

"I'm glad it's over with," he said. "You've treated me like a Christian, an' I'm thankin' you hearty for your kindness."

"Then may God receive you, a repentant sinner," she said, stronger.

"Aye," he answered, his deep voice as a response to her thin one, "may God receive me, a repintant sinner."

"Goodbye, Michael," she cried, and she threw her weight against the barrel.

But it did not overturn.

"Hans! Quick! Help me!" she cried faintly.

She could feel her last strength going as the barrel resisted her. Hans hurried to her, and the barrel went out from under Michael Dennin.

She turned her back, thrusting her fingers into her ears. Then she began to laugh, harshly, sharply, metallically; and Hans was shocked as he had not been shocked through the whole tragedy. Edith Nelson's breakdown had come. Even in her hysteria she knew it, and she reeled toward her husband.

"Take me to the cabin, Hans," she managed to articulate. "And let me rest," she added. "Just let me rest, and rest, and rest."

With Hans's arm around her, supporting her weight and directing her helpless steps, she went off across the snow. But the Indians remained solemnly to watch the working of the white man's law that compelled a man to dance upon the air.

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

And now, a delightful short-short by an author whom no one (including your Editors in their wildest dreams) could ever have expected to be a contributor to EQMM — Hodding Carter, the nationally famous independent-liberal editor and publisher of the Greenville, Mississippi, "Delta Democrat-Times," the crusading southerner who gave battle to Huey Long and who tangled with Theodore Bilbo, John Rankin, et al., the author of WHERE MAIN STREET MEETS THE RIVER, *a personal testament of his beliefs, ideals, and goals, and a Pulitzer Prize winner in journalism . . . an O. Henry-like tale of a Mississippi gambler, a welsher, and an old Southern lawyer who "always had a trick up his sleeve."*

BAD CHECK

by HODDING CARTER

SLIM GRANGER TURNED FROM THE cashier's window with the sick, angry feeling that comes to an honest gambler when he finds out too late that the dice were loaded, the horses doped, the cards stacked, or the wheel tilted.

He was just that, and only that, an honest gambler. He had drifted into the little riverside city five years before with a sufficient bankroll and an incorrigible love for anything that smacked of fair chance. In Greenfield he had made friends, even among those whom he outguessed and outsmarted in the unending game that went on in The Alligator Club, where the biggest men in town congregated. And now he had fallen in love — with a girl who frowned on gambling; and because certain plans had been agreed upon between them, he was now angrier at a welsher than he had ever been before. The cashier had been genuinely sympathetic. "Sorry, Mr. Granger, but Mr. Ransom doesn't have an account with us any more." Then he whispered, "He drew it all out the first thing today — not my business to tell you, but I can put two and two together."

Slim Granger turned away from the cashier's window with Ben Ransom's unhonored — or dishonored — check for $9,820 in his hand and a near murderous rage in his heart. There was nothing he could do, he told himself; a gambling debt was not legally collectible. He wasn't a thug gambler, willing to back up a demand for payment with a gun. Nor was he a substantial citizen of the community whose position had to be respected. He was just Slim Granger, with an

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angry-sick feeling inside him, a bad check in his billfold, and a certainty that any dreams he had entertained of settling down with Mary Lou Anderson on a yet unpurchased cattle farm had vanished in the cold light of a gambler's reality. And the worst part was that most of that $9,820 was his, won from him the week before by old Ben Ransom. Ransom was just about the richest man in town, a notorious tightwad, who cloaked his weakness for gambling and his vulture-like interest in a sure thing behind a sanctimonious solidity.

Slim Granger stood in the sunlight and thought back to The Alligator Club's poker table, and the good citizens of Greenfield who dropped in to take a hand in the biggest continuous poker game on the Mississippi. He had played against all comers. He had known his good nights and days and his bad days and nights, but not until now had any member of the club welshed on a poker debt. And now, of all times! The $8,000 which had been his own and the nearly $2,000 of Ben Ransom's were to have been Slim's stake in an unfamiliar game, a partnership in which only two were to sit around the table, and only one — and not himself — was to call the bets. The money was to have been used as a down payment on the cattle farm, after enough had been held out for a wedding ring and a New Orleans honeymoon.

Slim Granger thought fleetingly of going to Ransom's office and choking out of him his just due. What else could he do? Scorn the man out of his cheater's refuge? Bluff him? Maybe — but a 100-to-1 maybe at best. Ransom didn't bluff easy. The only man in Greenfield whom Slim had ever seen bluff him was old Lawyer Bunn.

Slim then considered Lawyer Bunn. A tough old customer if there ever was one; a crusty, vest-player who sat in the big game maybe once a month, and delighted to tangle with Ben Ransom and take a pot from him. Not a hypocrite, or a double-dealer — just a tough old boy who liked to gamble as much as any man along the river. Which was saying a lot. But a man who always had a trick up his sleeve, especially when Ben Ransom was involved . . .

Slim stood in Lawyer Bunn's smoky office, watching the old man examine Ransom's bad check.

"It's his, all right," the lawyer said. "Recognize it a mile away. Ought to. Made him pay more than once when he should have and didn't want to. But this one's different. Gambling debts aren't legal."

Slim nodded. "I know." He'd been nicked before, but not often, and never before by a man of Ransom's standing.

"He's a tightwad, all right — worse than a tightwad," Bunn said. "Better give me a little time to think it over. Suppose you be here first thing in the morning."

Slim Granger left without much hope. Nor did his pessimism diminish

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the next morning after he met Lawyer Bunn in his office. The old man was gloomily looking at the check in his hand.

"Don't know," he said. "Not much chance. But let's go over and see the old buzzard."

In Ransom's real estate office Lawyer Bunn wasted no time in getting to the point. He tore into the welsher.

"You're a cheat," he said. "And if I was a younger man, I'd tear you apart. Slim ought to but he can't afford to."

Ransom said nothing, but his face slowly mottled.

"Do you deny that this check is yours?" old Bunn shouted. He held it under Ransom's nose, then threw it down, disgustedly on the desk. "Why don't you do the decent thing, Ben, and pay this man? It won't hurt you."

"It's not collectible," Ransom said sullenly. "Besides, I got talked into that game, and I got my suspicions about how it's run. That's all."

Slim Granger's jaw muscles tightened.

"You're a liar," he said.

Bunn laid a restraining hand on the gambler's arm. The lawyer's shoulders seemed to wilt. "No use, Slim," he said. "He's got us. Nothing we can do." He leaned over Ransom's desk and picked up the check. "Ben," he said, bitterly, "I'd hate to live like you. But there's nothing we can do about it. Take this damn check and eat it." As Granger and Ransom watched him incredulously, Bunn ripped the check into tiny pieces and flung them in the welsher's face. Then he stalked out of the room, the gambler trailing behind him.

On the sidewalk outside, Slim Granger spoke angrily. "You really fixed me up, Mr. Bunn, but good."

The old man patted him soothingly. "I really did, Slim," he said. "Today or tomorrow Ben's going to reopen his account in the First National. Can't afford not to. And then you'll just go in and get your money." He fumbled in his vest pocket and pulled out a neatly folded check.

"Couldn't let you know. Afraid you couldn't keep a poker face. But if Ben had looked a little closer at the check I tore up, maybe he'd of seen it was just a reasonable facsimile," he said.

"Took me the better part of yesterday afternoon to make a copy of it. Now, go buy that farm — and tell Mary Lou."

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Of Charles Dickens and our **Black Mask** *department . . .*

Remember how Charles Dickens described a pair of Robin Redbreasts in OLIVER TWIST — *"officers from Bow Street" named Blathers and Duff: "The man who had knocked at the door was a stout personage of middle height, aged about fifty, with shiny black hair cropped pretty close, half whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The other was a red-headed, bony man, in top-boots, with a rather ill-favoured countenance, and a turned-up, sinister nose." Thus, the old Bow Street Runners, who were England's detectives prior to the organizing, in 1829, of London's official police force.*

Now, meet another pair of detectives, this time out of Black Mask, 1940: "He was thick and enormously wide across the shoulders . . . His eyes were empty and he wheezed a little when he breathed." That is the modern Blathers, except that he is now named Farnham. The other man "was small and shabby-looking, but he had an air of queer dusty brightness about him, and his eyes were like slick black beads." He was Duff in Dickens, but he is Vargas in Black Mask.

And while we are in a Dickensian mood, we might call your attention to some of the other characters you will meet in Norbert Davis's screwball scramble: the short pudgy man with the benign eyes and the silver-white hair that curled in smooth exact waves . . . the tall thin blonde who had been pretty once but now looked haggard and wearily defiant . . . the little old lady in a rusty black dressing-gown whose dear departed husband had been an undertaker and who took a dim view, to say the least, of detectives . . . Well, now you know what to expect. Remember that Black Mask stories were not always tough. They had their wacky side too. And why not? Life (than which there can be nothing more realistic) can be wacky too . . .

DO A DAME A FAVOR?

by NORBERT DAVIS

HE WAS A SHORT PUDGY MAN, AND he looked faintly benign even now with his eyes almost closed and his lips twisted awry with the effort of his breathing. He had silver-white hair that curled in smooth exact waves.

It was almost dawn and it was bit-

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ter cold. The outer door of the apartment lobby was open, and the wind made a sharp hurrying sound in the dark empty canyon of the street outside.

The pudgy man was sitting on the tiled floor of the lobby with his back against the wall, resting there, his stubby legs outspread in front of him. After a long time he began to move again, pushing his body away from the wall, turning very slowly and laboriously. His breath sounded short, but he made it and rested at last on his hands and knees.

He began to crawl toward the door and there was something inexorable about his slow, stubborn progress. He opened the door wider, fumbling blindly ahead of him, and crawled out into the street.

The wind whooped down and slapped the folds of his long blue overcoat tight around his legs, pushed with impatient hands as if to hurry him. But he crawled down the steps very slowly, one by one, reached the sidewalk, turned, and made his inching way down the hill toward the wan glow of the street light on the corner.

Behind him, the apartment lobby was empty and cold. On the wall, at the spot where the pudgy man had leaned his back, there was an irregular smear of blood, bright red and glistening with a sinister light all its own.

Dave Bly had hurried as much as he could, but it was after 6 o'clock in the evening when he came in from the street and trotted up the long dingy flight of stairs to the second story of the office building.

Janet was still waiting for him and he could hear the *tap-tap-tap* of her typewriter. He whistled once and heard the typewriter stop with a faint *ping*, saw her slim shadow through the frosted glass as she got up from her desk and started to put on her hat.

Bly ran on up a second flight of stairs to the third floor, with the thought of the interview ahead making something shrink inside him. He went down the third-floor corridor toward the lighted door at the end. The letters on its glass panel were squat and fat, and they made the legend:

J. S. CROZIER
Personal Loans

Bly opened the door and went into the narrow outer office. The door into the private office was open and J. S. Crozier's harsh voice came through it.

"Bly, is that you?"

"Yes, sir."

A swivel chair squeaked and then J. S. Crozier came to the door and said: "Well, you're late enough."

"I had to do quite a lot of running around."

"Let's see what you got."

Bly handed him a neat sheaf of checks and bills and the typewritten list of delinquent debtors. J. S. Crozier thumbed through the bills and checks, and the light overhead made shadowed trenches of the lines in his face. He had a thick solid body that he

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carried stiffly erect. He wore rimless glasses that magnified his eyes into colorless blobs and a toupee that was a bulging mat of black hair so artificial it was grotesque.

"Forty-three dollars!" he said, throwing the sheaf of bills on Bly's desk. "And half these checks will bounce. That's not much to show for a day's work, Bly."

"No, sir."

J. S. Crozier flicked his finger at the typewritten list. "And what's the matter with this Mrs. Tremaine? She's been delinquent for six weeks. Did you see her?"

"She's had a serious operation. She's in the hospital."

"Well, why didn't you try there?"

"I did," said Bly. He hadn't, but he knew better than to try to explain why. "They wouldn't let me see her."

"Oh, they wouldn't! When will they?"

"Next week."

"Huh! Well, you get in there and see her as soon as you can, and you tell her that if she doesn't pay up her loan — plus the back compound interest and the delinquent collection fee — she might just as well stay in the hospital because she won't have any furniture to come home to."

"Yes, sir."

J. S. Crozier grinned at him. "Haven't got your heart in this, have you, Bly? A little on the squeamish side, eh?"

Bly didn't say anything. J. S. Crozier let his colorless eyes move slowly from Bly's shoes, which were beginning to crack across the toes, up along the shabby topcoat to Bly's face, pale and a little drawn with pinched lines around his mouth.

"I can't afford to be squeamish, Bly. Maybe you can."

Bly didn't answer, and J. S. Crozier said reflectively, "I'm disappointed in your work, Bly. Perhaps you aren't suited to such a menial task. Are you contemplating a change soon?"

"No," said Bly.

"Perhaps you'd better think about it — although I understand jobs are very hard to find these days . . . very hard, Bly."

Bly was quivering with hopeless anger. He tried to hide it, tried so hard that the muscles of his face seemed wooden; but he knew he wasn't succeeding. J. S. Crozier chuckled knowingly. He kept Bly standing there for a full minute, and then he said, with the undertone of the chuckle still in his voice, "That's all, Bly. Good night."

"Good night," Bly said thickly.

J. S. Crozier let him get almost to the door. "Oh, Bly."

Bly turned. "Yes?"

"This janitor at your place. This Gus Findley. He's been delinquent for three weeks now. Get something out of him tonight."

"I'll try."

"No," J. S. Crozier said gently. "Don't try, Bly. *Do* it. I feel that you have a responsibility there. He mentioned your name when he applied for the loan, so naturally I had confi-

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dence in his ability to pay. Get some money from him tonight."

Bly went out and closed the door. Janet was waiting, a slim small girl with her face white and anxious for him under the dark brim of her hat. She took his arm, and Bly leaned heavily against her, his throat so thick with anger that he couldn't breathe. He pulled himself upright in a second and started walking, because he knew J. S. Crozier would be listening for his footsteps and grinning. Janet walked close beside him. They went down the steps, and Bly's anger became a sick despair.

"He knew you were there waiting, Janet. That's why he talked so loud. So you could hear him bawl me out."

"I know, dear. Never mind."

"Every day he does something like that. He knows I wouldn't do his dirty work for half a minute if I could find something else. I wouldn't anyway — I'd starve first — if it weren't for you and Bill and — and hoping . . ."

They were in the street now and she was standing small and straight beside him, looking up into his face. "We'll go on hoping, Dave."

"For how long?" Bly demanded bitterly. "How long?"

"Forever, if we have to," said Janet quietly.

Bly stared down at her. "Thank you," he said in a whisper. Then he grinned wryly. "Well, I'm through crying in my beer. Shall we go squander our money on Dirty Dan's thirty-five cent de luxe dinner?"

It was after 10 that night when Bly got to the apartment building where he lived, and he had to use his key to open the entrance door. The air was thick and sluggish inside the small lobby, full of a jangle of sound made by a radio being played too loud in one of the apartments upstairs.

Bly went on a diagonal across the lobbby, rapped lightly on a door beside the staircase. He could hear limping steps inside coming across a bare floor, and then Gus Findley opened the door and peered nearsightedly at him.

"Hello, Mr. Bly. You come in?"

Bly shook his head. "No, thanks, Gus. I hate to ask you, but how about the money you owe on that loan you got from Crozier?"

Gus Findley had a tired smile. "No, Mr. Bly. I'm sorry. I ain't got it."

Bly nodded slowly. "All right, Gus."

"I honest ain't got it."

"I know. Gus, why did you borrow money from him?"

"I thought he's all right if you work for him."

Bly said, "He's a shark, Gus. That contract you signed carries over a hundred per cent interest. It doesn't show on the contract as interest, but it's there."

"It don't make no difference, Mr. Bly. You shouldn't feel bad. I couldn't read very well anyway, that fine print, with my eyes not so good. I had to have the money for the hospital. My sister's boy got an operation."

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"Why didn't he go to the clinic — on charity?"

"No," Gus said gently. "No. I couldn't have him do that. Not my sister's boy. You know how it is."

"Sure," said Bly.

Gus moved his thin, stooped shoulders. "Now he's got to have cod liver oil and special milk and tonics. It costs so much I ain't got none left for Mr. Crozier. I ain't tryin' to cheat him, Mr. Bly. I'll pay as soon as I can."

"Sure, Gus," said Bly, knowing that as soon as Gus could wouldn't be soon enough for J. S. Crozier. It would be the same bitter story again — garnishment of the major part of Gus's meager salary, attachment of what few sticks of furniture he owned. And more humilitation for Bly. J. S. Crozier would never overlook the chance of making Bly serve the papers on Gus.

The lobby seemed colder and darker. The muffled wrangle of the radio went on unceasingly and a woman's laughter sounded through it, thin and hysterical.

"Someone having a party?" Bly asked.

Gus nodded gloomily. "Yeah. That one below you — that Patricia Fitzgerald. She is no good. Six or eight complaints about the noise I got already. I called her up a couple of times and it don't do no good. I got the misery in my back and I don't like to climb them stairs. Would you maybe stop and ask her to keep quiet, Mr. Bly?"

"Sure," said Bly. "Sorry about your back, Gus."

Gus shrugged. "Sometimes it's worse than others. How is your brother, Mr. Bly? The one that's in college."

Bly grinned suddenly. "Bill? Just swell. He's a smart kid. Going to graduate this year, and already they've offered him a job teaching in the college."

"Good," said Gus, pleased. "That's good. Then maybe, when you don't have to send him money, you can marry that nice little lady I seen you with."

"I hope so," Bly said. "But first I've got to get Bill through college. That's why I'm hanging on with Crozier so hard. I can't lose my job now, just when Bill's all set to graduate. After he does, then I can take a chance on looking for another — something decent. Well, I'll run up and see if I can tune that party down. So long, Gus."

Bly went up the grimy stairs and down the long hall above. The noise of the radio was much louder here, packing itself between the narrow walls until it was one continual blare. Bly stopped before the door through which it was coming and hammered on the panels.

The woman's shrill laughter came faintly to him. Bly waited for a while and then began to kick the bottom of the door in a regular thumping cadence. He kept it up for almost two minutes before the door opened.

Patricia Fitzgerald, if that was her

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real name, was a tall thin blonde. She must have been pretty once, but she looked haggard now and wearily defiant, and there was a reckless twist to her full-lipped mouth. She was drunk enough to be slightly unsteady on her feet. Her bright hair was mussed untidily and she was wearing what looked like a black fur mitten on her right hand.

"Well?" she said over the blast of the radio.

Bly said, "Do you have to play it that loud?"

She kept the door almost closed. "And who do you think you are, sonny boy?"

"I'm just the poor guy that lives above you. Will you turn that radio down a little, please?"

She considered it, swaying slightly, watching Bly with eyes that were owlishly serious. "If I turn it down will you — do a dame a favor?"

"What?" Bly asked.

"You wait." She closed the door.

The sound of the radio went down to a trickle of music and the hall seemed suddenly empty. Patricia Fitzgerald opened the door again. She no longer wore the black mitten. She was jingling some change in her right hand.

"You know where Doc's Hamburger Shack is — two blocks over on Third?"

Bly nodded. "Yes."

"Be a nice guy and run over there and get me a couple of hamburgers. If you do I won't make any more noise."

"O.K.," Bly agreed.

She gave him the change. "You tell Doc these hamburgers are for me. He knows me and he knows how I like 'em. Just tell him my name and tell him they're for me. Will you?"

"Right."

"And hurry up, willya, fella," said Patricia Fitzgerald, and neither her eyes nor her voice seemed blurred now.

Bly nodded, went back down the hall, down the stairs, and across the lobby. The last thing he heard as he opened the front door was Patricia Fitzgerald's laughter, sounding high and hysterical without the radio to muffle it.

Doc's Hamburger Shack was a white squat building on the corner of a weed-grown lot. Its moisture-steamed windows beamed out cheerily, and when Bly opened the door the odor of frying meat and coffee swirled about his head.

Doc was leaning against the cash register. He was gaunt and tall, and he had a bald perspiring head and a bedraggled mustache.

There was only one other customer. He was sitting at the far end of the counter. He was a short pudgy man and he looked pleasantly benign, sitting there relaxed with a cup of coffee on the counter in front of him. He had silver-white hair that curled in smooth exact waves. He watched Bly, sitting perfectly still, not moving anything but his round blandly innocent eyes.

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"Hello, Doc," Bly said, sitting down at the counter and reaching for the crumpled evening paper on it. "I want a couple of hamburgers to go out. They're not for me. They're for a blonde by the name of Patricia Fitzgerald who lives over in my apartment house. She said you'd know just how she wanted them fixed."

Doc put his hand up and tugged at one end of his mustache. "Patricia Fitzgerald? Lives at the Marton Arms? Apartment 107?"

Bly nodded, engrossed in the sports page. "Yeah."

"She tell you to give her name?"

Bly looked up. "Yes — that's what I said."

"O.K.," said Doc. "O.K." He plopped two pats of meat on the grill and then sauntered casually down the counter and leaned across it in front of the pudgy man.

Bly went on reading. The hamburger sizzled busily. Doc came sauntering back to the grill and began to prepare a couple of buns.

Bly had finished his sports column and was hunting through the paper for the comics when a siren began to growl somewhere near. After a while it died down and then another started up from a different direction.

"Must be a fire around here," Bly observed.

"Naw," said Doc. "Them's police sirens." He put a paper bag on the counter. "Here's your 'burgers, all wrapped up. Be careful of 'em. She don't like 'em mussed up any."

"O.K.," Bly said. He paid Doc with the change Patricia Fitzgerald had given him and went to the door.

The pudgy man was sipping at his coffee, but he was watching Bly calculatingly over the rim of his cup.

There were several cars parked in front of the apartment building and one of them was a blue sedan with a long glittering radio antenna strung across its sloping top. Bly barely noticed the car, and its identity didn't register on him until he unlocked the front door of the apartment house and nearly bumped into a policeman who was standing just inside.

"What —" Bly said, startled.

"You live here?" the policeman asked. He was standing spread-legged, his thumbs hooked into his broad leather gun belt.

"Yes," Bly answered blankly.

"You been in here before this evening?"

"Yes. I went out to get these hamburgers for the girl who lives below me in 107."

The policeman's expression was so elaborately disinterested that it was a dead give-away. "Dame by the name of Fitzgerald?"

"Yes. She asked me —"

The policeman came one step closer, suddenly caught Bly's right arm by wrist and elbow.

Bly struggled unavailingly. "Here! What — what—"

"March," said the policeman. "Right up those stairs. Get tough and I'll slap you down."

He steered Bly across the lobby

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and up the stairs. He went down the hall with Bly stumbling along beside him, like a clumsy partner in some weird dance.

The door of Patricia Fitzgerald's apartment was partially open and the policeman thrust Bly roughly through it and followed him inside.

"This is the bird," he said importantly. "I nabbed him downstairs in the lobby."

Bly heard the words through a thick haze that seemed to enclose his brain. He was staring unbelievably at Patricia Fitzgerald. She was lying half twisted on her back at the end of the couch. There was a bright thin line across the white of her throat and blood had bubbled out of it and soaked into the carpet. Her eyes were wide open, and the light above her glinted in the brightness of her hair.

There were two men in the room. One was sitting on the couch. He was thick and enormously wide across the shoulders. He sat with his hands on his knees, patient and unmoving, as though he were waiting for something he didn't expect to happen very soon. His eyes were empty and he wheezed a little when he breathed.

The other man was standing in the center of the room with his hands folded behind him. He was small and shabby-looking, but he had an air of queer dusty brightness about him, and his eyes were like slick black beads. He had a limp brown-paper cigarette pasted in one corner of his lower lip.

"Name?" he asked, and then more loudly, "You! What's your name?"

"Dave Bly. Is — is she —"

"Claims he lives upstairs," said the policeman. "Says he went out to get some hamburgers for the dame, here. I figure they was havin' a party and he gave her the business and then run and got them hamburgers and came back all innocent, tryin' to fake himself an alibi so —"

"Outside," said the shabby little man.

The policeman stared. "Huh?"

"Scram."

"Well, sure, Lieutenant," the policeman said in an injured tone. He went out and shut the door.

"I'm Vargas," the shabby man said. "Lieutenant of detectives. This is my partner, Farnham. What do you know about this business?"

Bly fought to speak coherently. "Nothing. Nothing at all. She was playing her radio too loud and I asked her to stop, and she said she would if I'd get her a couple of hamburgers . . ."

The big man, Farnham, got off the couch slowly and ominously. He came close to Bly, caught him by the front of the coat. Effortlessly he pulled Bly forward and then slammed him hard against the wall. His voice was thick and sluggishly indifferent.

"You lie. She was drunk and you got in a beef with her and slapped her with a knife."

Bly felt a sinking sense of nightmare-panic. "No! I didn't even know her! I wasn't here —"

"You lie," Farnham droned, slam-

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ming Bly against the wall again. "You're a dirty woman-killer. She got sassy with you and you picked up that knife and stuck it in her throat."

Bly's voice cracked. "I did not! Let go —"

The policeman who had brought Bly in was having some trouble in the hall, and they could hear him say indignantly: "Here now, lady! You can't go in there! Get away from that door! Lieutenant Vargas don't want nobody — Lady! Quit it, now! There's a corpse in there — all blood . . ."

A thin querulous voice answered snappily: "A corpse! Phooey! My dear departed husband was an undertaker, young man, and I've seen a lot more corpses than you ever will, and they don't scare me a bit. You want me to jab you right in the eye with this knitting needle?"

Evidently the policeman didn't, because the door opened and a little old lady in a rusty black dressing-gown pushed her way into the room. She had a wad of gray hair perched on top of her head like some modernistic hat, and she wore rimless spectacles on the end of a long and inquisitive nose.

"Hah!" she said. "I thought so. Bullying people, eh? My husband — dear Mr. Tibbet, the mortician — knew a lot of policemen when he was alive, and he always said they were extremely low-class people — rude and stupid and uncouth."

Farnham sighed. He let go of Bly and went back and sat down on the couch again. The springs creaked under his weight, and he relaxed into his position of ominous waiting.

"Who're you?" Vargas asked.

"Tibbet. Mrs. Jonathan Q. Tibbet — Q. for Quinlan — and you'd better listen when I talk, young man."

"I'm listening," said Vargas.

"Hah!" said Mrs. Tibbet. "Insolent, eh? And your clothes aren't pressed, either, and what's more, I'll bet you drink. Go ahead and bully me! Go ahead! I dare you! My dear dead husband was a personal friend of the mayor, and I'll call up and have you put in your place if you so much as lay a finger on me or this young man."

"Lady," said Vargas in a resigned tone, "I wouldn't touch you for ten dollars cash, but this lad is a suspect in a murder case and —"

"Suspect!" Mrs. Tibbet repeated contemptuously. "Bah! Did you hear me? I said *bah!*"

"I heard you," said Vargas.

Mrs. Tibbet jabbed a steel knitting needle in his direction like a rapier. "And why isn't he a suspect? Because he has an alibi, that's why! And I'm it. I was listening to this hussy carrying on in here. I saw this young man come and ask her very courteously to stop playing her radio so loudly. I was watching through my keyhole across the hall. He didn't even go inside the room. And when he left I heard her laughing in here. There was another man in here all the time, and if you and your low-class companion on the couch weren't so lazy you'd start finding out who it was."

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"Did you see this other gent?" Vargas asked patiently.

"Oh! So you're insinuating I'd snoop and spy on my neighbors, are you? I'll speak to the mayor about this. Mr. Tibbet laid out the mayor's first two wives, and they were very friendly all Mr. Tibbet's life, and if I tell him that his policemen are insulting and bullying me, he'll —"

"Yes, yes," said Vargas. "Sure. Absolutely. Did you see the other guy that was in here?"

"I did not."

"Did you hear his voice?"

"Yes. It was a very low-class voice — like yours."

"Yeah," said Vargas. He raised his voice. "O'Shay!"

The policeman peered in the door. "What, Lieutenant?"

"Escort Mrs. Tibbet back to her room."

Mrs. Tibbet allowed herself to be guided gingerly to the door, and then turned to fire a parting shot. "And let me tell you that I won't hear of you bullying this nice young man any more. He's a very courteous and quiet and honest and hard-working young man, and he could no more commit a murder than I could, and if you had any sense you'd know it, but if you had any sense you wouldn't be a policeman, so I'm telling you."

"That's right," said Vargas, "you are. Goodbye."

Mrs. Tibbet went out with her escort and slammed the door triumphantly. Farnham, sitting stolidly on the couch, said, "Back door."

Vargas glanced at him with his beady eyes, then stared at Bly. "Maybe. Yeah, maybe. What about it, sonny?"

"What about what?" Bly demanded.

Vargas said, "Farnham thinks maybe you went around and came in the back after you left the front door."

"I didn't!" Bly denied angrily. "You can check up at the stand where I got these hamburgers."

"Yeah. You said you didn't know the dame. Then why did you get her those hamburgers?"

Bly's face was flushed with anger. "I could have told you in the first place if you'd given me a chance!"

"You got a chance now."

"Gus, the janitor, asked me to stop here on the way up and ask her to be more quiet. She was tight and she said she would if I'd run over and get some hamburgers for her. I didn't want to argue with her and I didn't have anything particular to do, so I went. She gave me the money for them."

"What hamburger stand?"

"Doc's place — over on Third. He'll remember." Bly had a sudden thought. "I was in there when I heard your sirens. Do — do you know when she was killed?"

"And how," said Vargas. "She let out a screech like a steam engine when she got it. We got three calls from three different tenants. Did you see the guy that was in here with her?"

"No," said Bly. "I thought there was someone, but I didn't see him.

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She didn't open the door wide enough."

Vargas nodded. "O.K. Beat it. Stick around inside the building. I'll maybe want to talk to you again."

Bly stood his ground. "Well, you listen here. You have no right to grab me and push me around and accuse me —"

"Sure, sure," Vargas agreed lazily. "Your constitutional rights have been violated. Write a letter to the governor, but don't do it here. We're going to be busy. Scram!"

Bly went out into the hall. He was so blindly indignant at the manhandling he had received that it wasn't until he had reached his own room that the reaction began to set in. When he fumbled for his key, he found that he was still carrying the paper bag with the two hamburgers inside.

The odor of them suddenly sickened him. He went quickly through his apartment and dropped them, still wrapped, into the garbage pail on the enclosed back porch. He sat down then in the living-room and drew several deep steadying breaths. He noticed that his forehead was wet with perspiration.

Bly had never before run into violent and criminal death, and coming as it had without the slightest warning made it seem like a horrible nightmare. Even now he could see Patricia Fitzgerald as plainly as if she were in the same room with him — lying so queerly crumpled on the floor, with the bright red thread across her throat and the light glinting in the metallic yellow of her hair.

Back of him the door into the kitchen swung shut with a sudden swish. Bly's breath caught in his throat. He came up out of the chair and swung around, every muscle in his body tense.

There was no other sound, no other movement. He approached the door stealthily, pushed it back open again.

The kitchen was as empty as it had been when he had gone through it just a few moments before; but now, standing in the doorway, he could feel a draft blowing against the back of his neck.

Puzzled, he turned around. The door into his bedroom was open. There was no other place from which the draft could be coming. Bly went across the living-room and turned on the light in the bedroom.

One of the two windows on the other side of his bed was open. Bly stared at it, frowning. He remembered very distinctly that he had closed and locked both windows before he had left for work in the morning, because it had looked like rain.

He stepped closer, and then he saw that the glass in the upper pane of the window had been broken — at a spot, with the window closed, just above the lock. Fragments of glass glinted on the floor below the window, and there was a long gouge in the white paint of the sill.

Bly turned and walked quickly out of the apartment and down the stairs

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to the first-floor hall. The policeman was still on guard in front of Patricia Fitzgerald's apartment, and he surveyed Bly with evident displeasure.

"So it's you again. What do you want now?"

Bly said, "I want to see Vargas."

"It's Lieutenant Vargas to you," said the policeman. "And what do you want to see him about?"

"I'll tell that to him."

"O.K., smarty." The policeman opened the apartment door and announced, "Here's that guy again."

Vargas and Farnham had changed places. Vargas was sitting on the couch. He had his hat pulled down over his eyes and he looked as if he were dozing. Farnham was standing in the center of the room staring gloomily at the contents of an ornamental desk he had hauled out into the middle of the floor.

"There ain't nothing like that in here," he said to Vargas.

"Look in the kitchen," Vargas ordered. "Sometimes dames stick stuff away in sugar bowls. Don't paw around too much until the fingerprint guy gets here." He pushed his hat-brim back and stared at Bly. "Well?"

Bly said, "There's something upstairs — in my apartment — I think you ought to look at."

"There's plenty of things I ought to look at around here, if I could find them," Vargas said. "O.K. Come on."

They went upstairs, and Bly took Vargas into the bedroom and showed him the broken window.

"So what?" Vargas asked.

"I locked both those windows when I left this morning," Bly told him. "This apartment is directly above Patricia Fitzgerald's, and the fire escape goes past her windows and mine. I think the man who killed her came up the fire escape from her bedroom, broke in this window, and then went through my apartment and out into the hall."

"You're quite a thinker," Vargas said sourly. "Just why should he clown around like that when he could just as well go out the back door of Fitzgerald's apartment?"

"Because of the layout of the apartment building," Bly explained. "If he went out her rear door, he couldn't get away without going past the front of the building — there's a blind alley on this side that doesn't go through the block. But if he came through here, he could go along the second-floor hall, down the back steps, and out through the garage underneath and at the rear of the building. He probably didn't want to come out the front door of Patricia Fitzgerald's apartment because someone might be watching it after she screamed."

Vargas grunted. Hands in his pockets, he strolled closer to the window and carefully examined it and the glass on the floor. "Look and see if you're missing anything," he said over his shoulder.

Bly looked in his closet and the drawers of his bureau. "No. Nothing. There's nothing around here anyone could take except a few old clothes."

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Farnham came quietly in the bedroom and nodded at Vargas. "I couldn't find it, but I found out why."

"Why?" Vargas asked.

"She didn't pay none."

Vargas swung around. "What? You mean to say they let her live here without payin' any rent in advance?"

"Yeah," Farnham said. "They had a reason for it. It seems another tenant — a party who's lived here for over a year and paid his rent on the dot every month — recommended her and said that she was a good risk."

Vargas's eyes turned bright. "And who was this accommodating party?"

Farnham nodded at Bly.

"So?" said Vargas very softly.

He and Farnham stood there motionless, both watching Bly with the coldly detached interest of scientific observers, and Bly had the same sense of helpless bewilderment he had had when they were questioning him in the apartment below.

"What *is* this?" he demanded nervously. "What are you two talking about?"

"Sonny," said Vargas, "it seems like every time we turn around in this case, we fall over you. We're beginning to get tired of it. When you interrupted us downstairs, we were looking for Fitzgerald's rent receipt. We didn't find it, because she didn't have one, because she hadn't paid any rent yet. The reason she hadn't paid any is because *you* told the guys who own this building that she was O.K."

Bly swallowed hard. "You said that — that *I* recommended —"

"Yeah," said Vargas, "*you*. It seems mighty funny. You don't know this Patricia Fitzgerald at all, you say, but you run errands for her and you recommend her as a good credit risk. You'd better come up with some answers, and right now!"

"I never recommended her for anything to anyone!" Bly denied indignantly.

Farnham took a step closer. "Don't pull that stuff. I called up the bank that owns the place, and I talked to Bingham, the vice-president in charge of all their rental property. He looked it up, and said you did."

"But I didn't!" Bly said. "I don't even know —"

Farnham took another step. "Maybe you lost your memory. Maybe if you fell downstairs, you'd find it again."

"I heard you," said Mrs. Tibbet. She was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, nodding her head up and down meaningly. "Oh, I heard you, all right. I'm a witness. Falling downstairs, eh? I know what that means. Third degree. Dear Mr. Tibbett told me all about it. I'm definitely going to report you to the mayor."

The policeman's anxious face appeared over her shoulder. "Lieutenant, I couldn't help it. She sneaked up the stairs when she seen Farnham come up —"

"Scram," said Vargas curtly. "You too, lady. I got no time for fooling now. I'm busy. Get out of here."

Mrs. Tibbet still had her knitting

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needle, and now she held it up and sighted down its thin shining length. "Make me. Go ahead. I dare you! You're not going to beat up this poor boy, and I'm going to stay right here and see that you don't. You can't bully me. I'm not afraid of you. Not one bit!"

Vargas took a deep breath. "Look, lady. We just found out that this guy Bly, here, is the bird that vouched for the Fitzgerald dame when she came to live here."

"That's a lie," said Mrs. Tibbet.

Farnham wheezed indignantly. "It ain't! I just telephoned to Bingham, the vice-president —"

"I know him," said Mrs. Tibbet. "Horace Bingham. He's fat. Not as fat as you are, nor quite as sloppy, but almost. And he's even dumber than you are — if that's possible. If either one of you had asked me I could have told you who was responsible for the Fitzgerald creature's living here, but no, you wouldn't think of a simple thing like that. You're too busy going around shouting and threatening innocent people. Mr. Tibbet always said that no detective could count above five without using his fingers and what's more —"

"That's enough," Vargas said sharply. "You said you knew who was responsible for the Fitzgerald girl being here. Who?"

"If you had any sense you'd know by this time and wouldn't have to go around asking. It is Gus Findley, of course. The janitor."

"Are you sure?" Vargas asked.

"I'll have you know," said Mrs. Tibbet, "that I don't go around lying to people, not even to policemen, although that would hardly count because they aren't really people. Mr. Tibbet always said that all you needed to do was furnish a policeman with a tail and he'd be at home in any tree."

Vargas jerked his head at the policeman, who was still waiting nervously in the doorway. "Get Findley."

Farnham said doubtfully, "Seems like this Findley is a pretty old boy to go in for —"

"Hah!" said Mrs. Tibbet. "Men! I could tell you a thing or two —"

"Don't bother," Vargas advised wearily.

They waited and in a few minutes the policeman came back and thrust Gus Findley roughly into the bedroom.

Gus Findley blinked at them fearfully. He looked old and sick and shaken, and in the strong light his face had a leaden pallor. "What — what is it, please?"

Vargas strolled over to him. "Now look here, you. We know you're responsible for Patricia Fitzgerald coming to this joint. We want some facts, and we want 'em right now. Start talking."

Gus Findley's face twisted painfully. "She — she was my niece, sir." He turned to Bly. "Mr. Bly, I'm so sorry. Please don't be mad with me. She come here, and she didn't have no money, and I didn't have none I could give her on account of my sister's boy having that operation. So

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I — I said she could live here, and I — I told Mr. Bingham that you had recommended —"

"That's all right, Gus," Bly said uncomfortably. "If you had asked me, I probably would have recommended her for your sake. Don't worry about it. It's O.K."

"It's not O.K. with me," said Vargas. "Just tell us a little more about this niece of yours."

"She was no good," Gus said miserably. "She was never no good. Her name ain't Patricia Fitzgerald. It's Paula Findley. Her folks died, and I tried to raise her up right, but she would never do nothing I said, and then she run away with some fella and —"

"What fella?" Vargas interrupted.

Gus shook his head wearily. "I dunno. I never seen him. She said, when she come back, that he'd left her a long time ago. She said she was lookin' for the fella and that when she found him she was gonna get even with him and make herself a lotta money doin' it."

"What was his name?" Vargas asked.

"I dunno, sir. Seems like he had a lot of names, from what she said. Seems like he wasn't no good, either."

"That's the boy we want," said Farnham.

Vargas nodded absently. "Yeah. Now listen, Findley —"

"*You* listen," Mrs. Tibbet invited. "Mr. Findley is an old man, and he's sick. You're not going to ask him any more questions — not one more question, do you understand? I'm going to take him right down to my apartment and give him a nice hot cup of tea, and I don't want to see any silly detectives blundering around there while I'm doing it. You hear me?"

Vargas shook his head hopelessly.

Bly was ten minutes late to work the next morning, and J. S. Crozier was waiting for him, standing in the open door of his private office with his sallow face set in vindictive lines.

"Well, Bly, I'm glad to know that you feel so necessary here that you can afford to disregard the rules I've been at some pains to impress on your mind."

"I'm sorry," Bly said tightly. "I was delayed . . ."

The bulging mat of black hair that made up J. S. Crozier's toupee had slipped askew over one ear, and he poked at it impatiently. "Yes, yes. I noticed, however, that you entered the building some fifteen minutes ago. I suppose your delay, as you so nicely term it, had something to do with the little lady who works as a typist in the office downstairs."

"I spoke to her on my way up," Bly admitted.

"No doubt. I notice that you spend quite a little time speaking to her lately. Are you contemplating matrimony, Bly?"

"I think that's my affair — and hers," said Bly.

J. S. Crozier raised his eyebrows elaborately. "And mine, Bly, if you are talking to her on my time. Well, *are* you?"

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"Yes," said Bly.

"Thank you for telling me. I was wondering. If I may presume to advise you, Bly, I would say that it would be best for you to secure a position of a little more permanence before you take any rash steps. I'm not at all satisfied with your work. You're inclined to dawdle and find any excuse to keep from working. Aren't you, Bly?"

"I try to do my best," Bly answered.

"Yes," said J. S. Crozier. "Try. A good word. It is misfits and idlers like you who fill our relief rolls and burden the taxpayers. You haven't got any get-up-and-go about you, Bly. You'll never amount to anything. I feel sorry for your pretty friend downstairs if she marries you. I suppose you were so engrossed in her last night that you forgot all about the slight matter of the money Gus Findley owes me?"

Bly had to swallow before he could steady his voice. "I didn't really have a chance to talk to him about it. There was a murder at my apartment house last night and —"

"A murder!" said J. S. Crozier. "Now what kind of fairy tale is this? I suppose you're going to try to tell me that someone murdered Gus Findley!"

"I didn't say so," Bly said, keeping a tight grip on his temper. "But the police were questioning him about the murdered girl and the other tenants —"

"I see," said J. S. Crozier. "Very interesting. Do you suppose you might possibly, by the exercise of some great ingenuity, get to see him tonight? I'm growing impatient with you *and* your excuses, Bly."

"I'll see him tonight."

"You'd better," said J. S. Crozier grimly. "Now I have a call for you to make, Bly. The party's name is Perkins. He lives in the Marigold Apartments on Halley. Judging from that hovel that you live in, you wouldn't know, but the Marigold is an expensive residence. This party called and wants to borrow five hundred dollars with his furniture as security. The furniture should be worth many times that. Go over and check on it. Tell Perkins, if you find things satisfactory, that he can take a taxi and come back here with you, and I'll have the money for him."

J. S. Crozier pointed a blunt forefinger. "Don't make any mistake about the value of that furniture, Bly. And check on the title. Do you understand? Have I made it perfectly clear to your limited intelligence, or do you want me to write it down?"

"I understand," said Bly thickly.

"All right. And don't you take a taxi, getting there. Take the subway. I've noticed these delusions of grandeur in you. You seem to think you're too fine and sensitive a person to hold such a menial position as this, but just remember that if you had any brains you'd have a better one. Get out, Bly. And don't stall around with your lady friend on the second floor as you go, either."

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The Marigold Apartments was an immense gray-stone building that filled a whole block. Even without J. S. Crozier's word for it, Bly would have known immediately that it was an expensive residence. The doorman, after one look at Bly, was supercilious and the glittering chrome-and-black-marble expanse of the lobby made Bly painfully aware of his own shabby clothes and cracked shoes.

Mr. Perkins, it seemed, lived on the fifth floor in a de luxe apartment. The desk clerk — as supercilious as the doorman — made very sure Bly was expected before he would allow him to go up.

The elevator boy acted as though Bly's appearance was a personal affront to him. He deliberately stopped the elevator a foot below the floor and let Bly step up, and he stayed there ostentatiously watching until he made sure Bly was going to the apartment where he was expected.

The doorbell of Mr. Perkins's apartment was a black marble knob. Bly tried pushing it without effect, finally pulled it and heard chimes ring inside. The door opened almost instantly and a voice said, "Won't you come in, please, Mr. Bly?"

Bly stepped into a long low room with a far wall that was one enormous window, facing out on a private flagged terrace that looked bright and clean in the sunlight.

"Shut the door, if you please, Mr. Bly."

Bly pushed the door shut, trying to place the man who was speaking to him. He was a short, pudgy man with an air that was benignly pleasant. He had silver-white hair that curled in smooth exact waves. Suddenly Bly realized he was the same man he had seen in Doc's Hamburger Shack the night before, and, in the same second, without quite knowing why, he felt a cold tingle along the back of his neck.

The pudgy man had small pink hands. He put the right one in his coat pocket and brought out a flat automatic. He was still smiling.

"Sit down. The chair beside the telephone, if you please."

Bly went sideways one cautious step after another, sank in the chair beside the stand that held a chrome-and-gold telephone set.

"If this is a hold-up," he said huskily, "you — you're wasting your time. I didn't bring the money you wanted to borrow with me. There's no way you can get it without appearing at the office yourself."

"No hold-up," said the pudgy man in his softly amiable voice. "My name is not Perkins. It is Johanssen — two s's, if you please. You have heard it, perhaps?"

"No," said Bly.

"You recognize me, though?"

Bly nodded stiffly. "Yes. You were in Doc's Hamburger Shack last night when I came in."

"Just so." Johanssen stood staring at him for a second, his bland eyes speculatively wide. "You do not look like a thief, but then one can never tell in these matters. I would like to

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tell you a story, Mr. Bly. You do not mind? I will not bore you?"

"No," said Bly.

Johanssen smiled. "Good. Since you do not recognize my name I will tell you I am a pawnbroker. But not the ordinary kind. You believe me, Mr. Bly? Not ordinary."

"Yes," said Bly.

"Good," Johanssen repeated. "My business is in my hat. I have no office. I go to my customers. They are all rich people, Mr. Bly. But sometimes they need cash — lots of cash — very quickly. They do not want people to know this. So they call Johanssen. I come to them with the cash. You see?"

"Yes," Bly admitted uncertainly.

"One year ago, Mr. Bly, a person called me and gave me the name of a very prominent person with whom I had done business many times. This person wanted ten thousand dollars at once. He is good for much more, so I say I will bring it to him. But, he says, he is not at home. He is at the apartment of a friend. Will I bring it to him there? So I bring the money where he says. But it is not my customer that has called me. It is a thief. You are listening carefully, Mr. Bly?"

"Yes," said Bly.

"Good. This thief, he is waiting for me in the darkness of the stairs of the apartment house. He gives me no chance, Mr. Bly. He stabs me in the back with a knife, takes my money, and runs away. He thinks I am dead. But no. I crawl down the stairs, through the lobby, into the street. I crawl two blocks before someone sees me and calls an ambulance. It was very hard, that crawling. I remember that, Mr. Bly."

Bly swallowed. "Why — why didn't you wake someone in the apartment house?"

"No," said Johanssen gently. "That would bring the police. This is not a business for police. This is Johanssen's business. You see?"

Bly nodded blankly.

"You do not understand," Johanssen said. "It is known everywhere that Johanssen carries large sums of money with him. It must be known, also, that it is not safe to rob Johanssen. Not because the police will come after you, but because Johanssen will come after you. Now you understand?"

Bly had the same sense of nightmare-panic he had felt the night before, when he had been accused of murdering Patricia Fitzgerald.

"You're not saying — that I —"

"No, no. May I go on with my story? I found out who stabbed me. It took much money and time, but then I did not find the man. Only some of the names he had used. I found out that he had done many crimes — not bad ones like this, only cheating and swindling. This time he is very afraid. He runs and hides, and hides so well that I cannot find him. But I do find his woman. He leaves her when he runs with my money. You can guess who his woman was, Mr. Bly?"

"Patricia Fitzgerald," Bly said.

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"Yes. She is very angry because he left her. When I offer her one thousand dollars to point this man out to me she says she will do it if she can find him. She did. Last night he was in her apartment. He murdered her. Do you know who that man was, Mr. Bly?"

"No!" Bly exclaimed.

"I am willing to pay *you* one thousand dollars if you will tell me who it was."

"But I don't know!" Bly said. "I didn't see him."

"Then," said Johanssen gently, "then you will give me back my one thousand dollars, please."

"You — your what?"

"My one thousand dollars."

"But I haven't got — I never saw —"

"Yes. It was in an envelope in the paper bag that contained the hamburgers."

Bly's mouth opened. "Envelope — hamburgers . . ."

"Yes. You see, this Patricia Fitzgerald did not trust me. First, before she points out the man who stabs me, she must see the money. We arrange it. I will wait in the hamburger stand. She will send someone who will mention her name. I will put the money with the hamburgers. Then she will lead this man to this apartment. I will be waiting for them. The one thousand dollars is a reward I have offered, Mr. Bly. I have even put it in the papers that I will pay that much to anyone who shows me the man who stabbed me. But you have not done so. Give me the one thousand dollars back, please, at once."

Bly shook his head dizzily. "But I didn't know —"

Johanssen moved the automatic slightly. "I am not joking, Mr. Bly. Give me my one thousand dollars."

"Listen," Bly said desperately. "I didn't even open the bag. I threw the whole business, just as Doc gave it to me, in the garbage pail."

"Garbage?" Johanssen repeated gently. "This is not the time to be funny, Mr. Bly."

Bly leaned forward. "But it's true! I did just that. Wait! Gus Findley! The janitor at my apartment house! He's got a lame back and I hardly ever cook in my apartment . . ."

"Yes?" Johanssen said very softly.

"Maybe he hasn't emptied the garbage pail! Let me call him up. It's a chance —"

"A chance that you are taking," Johanssen said. There was an icy flicker deep in his eyes. "You may call him up. I will listen. Be very careful what you say."

Fumblingly, with cold and stiff fingers, Bly dialed the number of the apartment house. He could hear the buzz of the telephone ringing, going on and on interminably while the icy flame in Johanssen's eyes grew brighter.

And then the line clicked suddenly and Gus Findley's voice said irritably, "Yes? What you want, please?"

Bly drew in a gulping breath of relief. "Gus! This is Dave Bly."

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"Ah! Hello, Mr. Bly. How are you? I ain't got that money to pay Mr. Crozier yet, Mr. Bly. I'm sorry, but —"

"Never mind that. Listen to me, Gus. Have you emptied the garbage pail in my apartment this morning?"

"No, I ain't. I'm sorry, Mr. Bly, but my back has been sore like anything and them damned police has been botherin' —"

"Gus!" said Bly. "I want you to do me a favor. Go up to my apartment. Go on the back porch and look in the garbage pail. There's a small paper bag right on top. It's closed. Bring the bag down with you. I'll hold the line."

"Well, sure . . ."

"Hurry, Gus! It's very important!"

"You ain't sick, are you, Mr. Bly? You sound —"

"Gus!" Bly exploded. "Hurry up!"

"O.K. Sure. Hold the wire."

Bly heard the receiver bump as Gus put it down, and then there was nothing but the empty hum of the open circuit. He waited, feeling the sweat gather on his forehead. Johanssen had come quietly closer, and Bly could catch the black glint of the automatic, leveled a foot from his head.

After centuries of time the receiver bumped again and Gus said cheerfully, "Sure, I got it. What you want I should do with it?"

Bly leaned back in his chair, sighing, and nodded once at Johanssen. "All right. What now?"

Johanssen's eyes had lost their frosty glint. "This Gus — he is an honest man?"

Bly nodded weakly. "Yes."

"Tell him to open the bag and the envelope."

"Gus," Bly said into the telephone. "Inside the bag you'll find an envelope. Take it out and open it."

"Sure, Mr. Bly. Wait." Paper crackled distantly and then Gus's voice suddenly yammered frantically. "Mr. Bly! It's money! It's thousands! Mr. Bly!"

"Take it easy, Gus," Bly said. "It was put in there by mistake. I'm going to let you talk to the man who owns the money. He'll tell you what to do."

"I don't want so much money here! I'm gonna call a cop! I'm afraid —"

"Here's Mr. Johanssen. Talk to him."

Johanssen took the telephone. Gus was still shouting at the other end of the line, and Johanssen, beginning to smile a little more broadly, finally managed to get a word in.

"Yes, Gus. Yes, yes. It is my money. No. Don't call a policeman. Just keep it for me." The receiver fairly crackled and Johanssen held it away from his ear, wincing. "No, no. No one will rob you. All right. Lock yourself in. I will knock three times and then twice. Yes, I will bring a writing from Mr. Bly. All right. Just be calm."

He hung up the receiver and nodded at Bly. "That is a good man." The automatic had disappeared.

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Bly wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Yes. Gus is a swell old gent. He has a tough time."

"And you have had a tough time," said Johanssen. "Yes. I am very sorry, Mr. Bly. I beg your pardon. Can I do something for you to show I am sorry, please?"

"No," Bly said. "It's all right."

Johanssen watched him. "Mr. Bly, I am very anxious to find the man who was in that apartment. You may still have the reward if you can tell me anything that will lead me to him."

Bly shook his head wearily. "I don't know anything."

"Think," Johanssen urged. "Something small, perhaps. Some little thing you may have noticed."

"No," said Bly woodenly.

Johanssen shrugged. "So it will be, then. But please let me do something to show I am sorry."

"No," said Bly in an absent tone. "If you want to do something for somebody, give Gus a couple of hundred out of the thousand, so he can get free of that shark I work for."

"I will do that. Surely."

"I've got to go," Bly said. "I'm — in a hurry."

"Surely," said Johanssen, opening the door. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Bly. Please forgive me."

Bly took a taxi back to the office. All the way there he leaned forward on the seat, trying to hurry the taxi's progress. When it stopped at the curb in front of the office building he was out of it before the driver could come to a stop. He flung a crumpled bill over his shoulder and raced up the stairs, past the second floor and Janet's office, up to the third floor and down the corridor.

The hammer of his feet must have warned J. S. Crozier, because he was just coming out of his private office when Bly burst through the front door. Bly closed the door behind him and leaned against it, panting.

"Well," said J. S. Crozier, "you're back in a hurry, Bly. But I don't see any customer. Have you some more excuses to offer this time?"

Bly was smiling. He could feel the smile tugging at the corners of his lips, but it was like a separate thing, no part of him or what he was thinking.

J. S. Crozier noticed the smile. "Bly, what on earth is the matter with you?"

"I feel fine," Bly said. "Oh, very fine. Because I've been waiting for this for a long time."

"Bly! What are you talking —"

Bly stepped away from the door. "You've had a lot of fun with me, haven't you? You've bullied and insulted and humiliated me every chance you got. You knew I had to take it. You knew I had a brother in college who was dependent on me and my job. You knew I wanted to get ahead, but that I couldn't unless I had more training. You knew when I came here that I was taking courses in a night school, and you deliberately gave me work that kept me late, so I couldn't finish those courses."

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"Bly," said J. S. Crozier, "are you mad? You can't —"

"Oh, yes I can. I can tell you now. You've had your fun, and now you're going to pay for it. You're going to pay pretty heavily and you're going to know I'm the one who made you pay."

"You're insulting," J. S. Crozier snapped. "You're fired, Bly. If you don't leave at once I'll call the police."

"Oh, no," said Bly. "You won't call the police, because that's what I'm going to do. How does it feel to be a murderer, Mr. Crozier?"

"Eh?" said J. S. Crozier. The color washed out of his cheeks and left the lines on them looking like faint indelible pencil marks. "Wh-what did you say?"

"Murderer."

"You — you're crazy!"

"Murderer," repeated Bly. "You murdered Patricia Fitzgerald."

"Bly! You're a maniac! You're drunk! I won't have you —"

"You murdered Patricia Fitzgerald and I'm the one who knows you did it. I'm the one who will get up on the stand and swear you did it. I'm the one — Bly, the poor devil it was so much fun for you to bully because you knew I couldn't strike back at you. Was the fun worth it, Mr. Crozier?"

J. S. Crozier's mouth opened, fishlike, and closed again before he could find words. "Bly! You can't make mad accusations like that. You — you're sick."

"No. I happened to remember a couple of small things. When I came to Patricia Fitzgerald's door last night and she opened it, she was wearing what I thought was a black fur mitten. It wasn't. It was *that wig of yours* — your toupee. She had it wrapped around her right hand. She had been laughing at how you looked without it, or perhaps she had been trying it on herself."

"You lie!" J. S. Crozier shouted, putting his hand over the bulging toupee protectively. "You lie!"

"No. I saw it. I'll swear I saw it. And another thing. Just a little while ago, when you were speaking about the Marigold Apartments and how luxurious they were, you said, 'Judging from that hovel you live in . . .' You knew my address, but you'd never been in my apartment — *until last night.* You were then. You broke in the window after you murdered Patricia Fitzgerald."

Beneath the toupee the veins on J. S. Crozier's forehead stood out like purple cords. "You're a liar and a fool!" He laughed chokingly. "You think that's enough evidence for a charge of murder? Bah! Get out! Go to the police! They'll laugh at you! I'm laughing at you!" His whole body shook with mirth.

The door opened quietly and Johanssen stepped inside the office. "May I laugh, too, please?" he asked softly.

J. S. Crozier's breath hissed through his teeth. He seemed to shrink inside his clothes. The toupee had slipped

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down over his forehead and it fell now and lay on the floor like an immense hairy spider. J. S. Crozier's own hair was a blond, close-clipped stubble.

Johanssen smiled and nodded at Bly. "You should never play poker, Mr. Bly. Your face gives you away. I knew you had remembered something, so I followed you. It is nice to meet you again, Mr. — ah — Crozier."

"Bly," J. S. Crozier said in a shaky whisper. "Run for help. Quick! He'll kill me."

"Mr. Bly will not move," said Johanssen gently. "No."

Bly literally couldn't have moved if he had wanted to. He was staring, fascinated, from Johanssen to J. S. Crozier. Johanssen had his right hand in his coat pocket, but he apparently wasn't at all excited or in any hurry.

"I have been looking for you for a long time," he said. "It is so very, very nice to see you at last."

J. S. Crozier began to shake again. "Johanssen," he begged hoarsely. "Wait. Wait, now. Don't shoot me. Listen to me. It was an accident. I didn't mean — Johanssen! You can't just shoot me in cold blood! I'll pay back the money I stole from you! Johanssen, please —"

The door opened in back of Johanssen, pushing him forward. He stepped aside quickly, and Vargas came in.

"Police," he said casually to Crozier. "Hello, Bly. I've been following you around today. Checking up."

J. S. Crozier caught his breath. "Officer!" he shouted hoarsely. "Arrest this man! He's going to kill me!"

"Which man?" Vargas asked. "You mean Johanssen? Are you thinking of killing anyone, Mr. Johanssen?"

"No, Mr. Vargas," said Johanssen.

"See?" said Vargas to Crozier. "You must be mistaken. Well, I've got to run along. Behave yourself, Bly."

"No!" J. S. Crozier pleaded. "No, no! You can't! Take me with you!"

"What for?" Vargas inquired reasonably. "I couldn't take you with me unless I arrested you for something. And what would I arrest you for — unless it was for murdering Patricia Fitzgerald last night?"

J. S. Crozier swayed. "That — that's absurd!"

Vargas nodded. "Sure. That's what I thought. Well, so long."

J. S. Crozier held on to a desk to keep upright. "No! You can't go and leave me to this — this . . . Wait! Johanssen thinks I stabbed and robbed him! You've got to arrest me for that! You've got to lock me up!"

Vargas looked at Johanssen in surprise. "Did he stab you, Mr. Johanssen?"

"I have not said so."

Vargas started out again.

J. S. Crozier's face was horribly contorted. "No! You can't leave me alone with — with —"

Vargas stood in the doorway. "Well? Well, Crozier?"

"Yes," Crozier whispered hoarsely.

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"I did it. I killed her. I knew — the way she looked and acted after Bly went for the hamburgers. I twisted her arm and — and she told me . . ." His voice rose to a scream. "Take me out of here! Get me away from Johanssen!"

Vargas's voice was quick and sharp now. "You heard it, both of you. You're witnesses. Farnham, come in."

Farnham came stolidly into the office. "Come on, baby," he said in his heavy indifferent voice. J. S. Crozier's legs wouldn't hold his weight, and Farnham had to half carry him out the door.

"Could have nailed him on that toupee business," Vargas said, casual again, "but this way made it more certain. Johanssen, you stick around where I can find you."

"I will be very glad to testify. I will also wish to witness the execution, if you please."

"I'll arrange it," Vargas promised. "Kid, that was clever work — that business about the toupee."

"It just — came to me," Bly said shakily. "All of a sudden it seemed all clear — after Mr. Johanssen told me about the arrangement for him to wait in the hamburger stand. I knew then that Patricia Fitzgerald was playing her radio loud on purpose. She thought Gus, the janitor, would come up and then she would have sent him for the sandwiches. And then I remembered the black mitten. . . ."

High heels made a quick tapping along the corridor and Janet ran into the office. "Dave! Are you all right? I saw Mr. Crozier going downstairs with another man. He — he was crying . . ."

Bly said, "It's all right now, dear. Mr. Crozier was the man who murdered that girl in my apartment house. I'll tell you about it a little later."

"I'll be going," said Vargas. "Bly, stick around where I can find you."

"That will be easy," Bly said bitterly. "Just look on the handiest park bench. I was so clever I thought myself right out of a job."

"I will go also," said Johanssen, "but first there is this." He took a thick wallet from his pocket. Carefully he counted out ten one-hundred-dollar bills.

"The reward, which I have offered legally and which I have advertised in the papers. Mr. Vargas is a witness that you earned it and that I paid it."

Vargas nodded, then said conversationally, "Bly, I've been standing around here wondering when you were going to kiss this girl of yours. Don't you think it's about time?"

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Inspector Hazlerigg and the man who objected to roses in the wallpaper

THE CUSTOMER IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT

by MICHAEL GILBERT

When chief inspector Hazlerigg was a young constable, his duty took him to most of the Magistrates Courts in London. Later, as a Divisional Detective-Inspector, his official appearances became rarer, but he made a point of visiting them when he could. The greater part of London's criminal population passes through these Courts and a keen young Inspector can learn a lot by sitting quietly in the back and observing the faces and listening to the voices of the men in the dock.

On this particular morning it was largely sentiment that brought him to the Marsham Street Police Court. In that Court, 35 years before, his first evidence, given in a voice that had not long broken, had led to the imposition of a five shilling fine on a drunken cab driver. Mordaunt had been magistrate in those days — the bearded bullfrog, as the junior members of the police force had called him. Now it was the gentle and experienced Sharpe.

Hazlerigg pushed open the swing door and looked in.

"I said to him," it was a large man with a brown face and a craggy nose speaking, "if you don't like my roses, you can go chase yourself."

Hazlerigg deduced that it was the prisoner who was giving evidence.

"Roses," said Mr. Sharpe patiently. "In March?"

"On the wallpaper."

"Oh, he objected to your wallpaper?"

"That's right. This joker comes busting into my office and starts talking about my wallpaper."

From the voice Hazlerigg guessed a New Zealander.

"And then what happened, Mr. Cooper?"

"What happened?" said Mr. Cooper. "Why, I busted him right on the nose."

"That seems rather drastic," said Mr. Sharpe.

"He'd got no right to go calling down my wallpaper. I chose it myself."

Mr. Sharpe glanced at the witness who had complained of the assault. He was a big, red-faced man, and from the way in which he had given his evidence Mr. Sharpe judged that he might be an irritating customer. However, it wouldn't do to allow

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art criticism to develop into a vulgar brawl.

He imposed a fine of 40 shillings and bound Mr. Cooper over.

Hazlerigg attached himself to the New Zealander as he left the Court. A man who feels himself to be in the right and has had to fork out £2 is usually ready for a drink. Mr. Cooper was no exception.

Presently he was steaming gently over a pint of beer.

"It was just a lot of hooey about nothing," he said. "Way back in Auckland we don't set all that store by a punch on the nose. I keep this Hotel, see — the Commodore in Endell Street. I've had it since the war, and it's doing all right. Then one evening this joker comes along. We give him the best room. I chose those roses myself, and roses are something I know about and the man who says the contrary —"

Hazlerigg hastily ordered more beer.

"Then, about 9 o'clock, he comes along and wants to change his room. If he'd had a reason, I wouldn't have minded, see. But picking on my roses —"

When he got back to his office at Scotland Yard, Hazlerigg sat and reflected for a bit.

There was nothing in the story at all. Absolutely nothing. It was wasting time to think further about it.

All the same, he rang his bell and said to Sergeant Crabbe, when that mournful man appeared, "At Marsham Street Police Court this morning a gentleman with a red face gave evidence against the proprietor of the Commodore Hotel in Endell Street, who had hit him on the nose for objecting to his roses."

"Roses, sir? Surely it's a little early —"

"Yes, yes. I can't explain it all now. I just want to know the name and address of the man who made the complaint. And see if we've got anything on him."

Sergeant Crabbe reported back an hour later. "The gentleman's name is Mitcham. Leslie Mitcham. He's an ironmonger. Lives at Streatham."

"Mr. Mitcham of Streatham."

"That's right, sir. And nothing known."

"Did he register at the Commodore under that name?"

Crabbe didn't know. He said he'd find out. This time he used the telephone to save his feet and was back in five minutes.

"That's right," he said. "Registered as Mitcham of Streatham. English subject. Intended duration of stay, one night. Actual stay, three hours."

"Oh, I see. He cleared out when the proprietor hit him. Can't blame him really. But if he's got a home at Streatham, why trouble to put up for the night in Endell Street? He could get home in half an hour."

"I couldn't say," said Crabbe.

"All these hotel registrations are checked from time to time, aren't they?"

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"They're supposed to be."

"Well, chase it up."

"Chase what up, sir?"

"I want to find if Mr. Mitcham has registered in a London hotel anywhere during the last three years."

"Yes, sir. Would there be anything else, sir?" inquired Sergeant Crabbe, sounding as insubordinate as he dared.

"On second thought," said Hazlerigg, "make it five years."

It was nearly a week before Sergeant Crabbe reported.

"Shocking state these hotel registrations have got into," he said. "I've had to do most of it on my feet."

Hazlerigg made a sympathetic noise.

"Any luck?" he said.

"It depends," said Sergeant Crabbe, "what you mean by luck." He pulled out his notebook. "Twelve months ago Mitcham stayed at the Enderby Hotel — that's off Bedford Square. Six months before that he was at the Collingridge in Rope Street. Nine months before that at the New Berkley in Albany Street. And that isn't all.

"Three days after he'd been at the Enderby they had a big robbery. Valuables cleared out of about a dozen bedrooms."

"I see," said Hazlerigg. "Same story at the others, too?"

"Not quite. The day after he left the Collingridge it was burnt down. It's been rebuilt now. The New Berkley went bust and sold out."

"He doesn't seem to have brought much luck with him, our Mr. Mitcham," said Hazlerigg softly. "What do you make of it?"

"Coincidence," said Sergeant Crabbe promptly.

"Two may be coincidence," said Hazlerigg. "Three's too many." He rang up Mr. Cooper at the Commodore and reintroduced himself. "I just wanted to find out," he inquired, "if anything has happened to you in the last week."

"What sort of thing?" said Mr. Cooper, suspiciously.

"Fire — burglary —"

"Not yet, it hasn't."

"Keep your fingers crossed," said Hazlerigg, and went off to see the proprietors of the Enderby and the Collingridge, and the ex-proprietor of the New Berkley.

When he came back he found Sergeant Crabbe waiting for him.

"One more," said the Sergeant. "Mitcham stayed three years ago at the Family Hotel in Euston Lane. And it's a funny thing. Three days after he left —"

"They had a big burglary. Cleared out all the bedrooms."

"Someone told you," said Sergeant Crabbe resentfully.

"I guessed. You told me the Enderby had a burglary. Well, as I've just found out, so did the New Berkley. They were under-insured. That's one of the reasons they went bust."

"No one burgled the Collingridge," said Crabbe.

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"Have a heart," said Hazlerigg. "It was burnt down the day after Mitcham left. Fault in the electric wiring. You can't burgle a heap of charred cinders. In both the other cases our Mr. Mitcham had been staying in the hotel two or three days before the burglary. In both cases he objected to the wallpaper in his room. In both cases the hotel proprietors, being effete Englishmen not trained in the rougher School of Auckland, New Zealand, didn't give him a punch on the snoot. They merely gave him a new room."

"That's right," said Crabbe.

"Well, it's all quite plain now."

"It isn't plain to me," said Sergeant Crabbe.

"Use your head. Why does a man stay at different hotels at regular intervals, and always make a point of changing his room. Ironmonger."

"Oh, that lark," said Sergeant Crabbe. "What are you going to do?"

"Warn all hotels. He failed at the Commodore. He may try again."

Three months later a Mr. Mitcham duly turned up at the Blackwater Hotel in Dorset Square. He booked a room on the second floor, and seemed quite satisfied with it, but before the evening was out he had changed his mind. He wanted one with running water, he explained. The proprietor was quite agreeable. He allotted Mr. Mitcham a room on the first floor. He also got busy on the telephone.

The next morning Mr. Mitcham left and Chief Inspector Hazlerigg arrived. He made a tour of the premises, seeming to be particularly interested in Service doors and backstairs.

Two days later, at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the door into the court at the back of the premises opened quietly and a nondescript man came through. He had a small laundry basket under his arm.

He made his way confidently up the servants' stairs, and out into the corridor where he knocked at a bedroom door. Receiving no reply he took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and went in.

When he came out, the basket seemed heavier. He moved along to the next door and repeated the performance.

When he came out this time he was quite upset to find three men waiting for him. One was the manager. The other two were policemen.

"What beats me," said the manager, "is where he got that key. Do you realize it's a master key and will open any bedroom in the hotel?"

"Of course it's a master key," said Hazlerigg soothingly. "I should have been very disappointed if it hadn't been. Why do you suppose Mr. Mitcham changed his room?"

"Even so —"

"A master key is a combination of all the other keys, with the unnecessary bits left out. Anyone who knows about keys can construct it if he gets hold of *any two keys in the set!* Simple, isn't it? Practically infallible."

"Not quite," said Sergeant Crabbe. "God bless New Zealand."

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Babette Rosmond became "entangled with professional writing" when she was seventeen — and she has been at it, in one form or another, ever since. She was an editor in a literary agency for three years. She worked for Street & Smith, editing "The Shadow" and "Doc Savage" and signing herself as B. Rosmond — to keep readers from raising their eyebrows at the very thought of a member of the so-called weaker sex supervising such rough, tough shenanigans. Last year she was Fiction Editor of "Today's Family." And betweentimes she has had more than 30 short pieces published in "The New Yorker," "Charm," "Mademoiselle," and other magazines. And to show the full extent of her "entanglement," her first two novels were published by Dutton — THE DEWY, DEWY EYES *(with the fascinating background of life on pulp magazines as seen through the eyes of a naive young lady from Indiana) and* A PARTY FOR GROWNUPS; *her third novel,* LUCY, OR, THE DELAWARE DIALOGUES, *was published by Simon & Schuster in 1952. And that isn't all: what price entanglement? Babette Rosmond's fourth novel is finished, and at the time of this writing, despite being a wife, a homemaker, and the mother of two young children, she has just completed her first full-length play. More power to the modern, emancipated, and extremely gifted women of 1954!*

We think you will like Babette Rosmond's first short story for EQMM. It deals with one of the subtlest of perfect crimes — indeed, one of the most insidious offenses in the "compleat" calendar of wrongdoing.

BEST OF FRIENDS

by BABETTE ROSMOND

FOR TWO YEARS PEOPLE HAD BEEN saying of Marysue Johnson, "She's such a good sport." They were referring to her flawless conduct when Ted Alloway jilted her for a girl named Olive. Marysue laughed it off, bought a handsome engagement present for the young couple, and married Don Johnson, who had just gone to work for a large New York newspaper. Don had been hanging around Marysue forever; they grew up together in the suburb of Elysia and she used to make fun of him because he was so painstakingly honest and fussy. People admired Marysue even more when

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the Alloways and the Johnsons became the best of friends. It showed how civilized people could be.

Well, part of it was true. Very few outsiders realized that Don was constantly bothered. Marysue would catch him looking at her a certain way and she'd say, "Oh, Lord, are you on *that* again?" — and then he'd say, "I saw the way you were looking at Ted and I didn't like it." But Marysue couldn't help it. For all the almost-contentment of her married life, there was a microcosm of ravaged pride eating at her, sometimes in casual nibbles, sometimes in full meals. It got to be unbearable at parties when there had been something to drink; then Marysue would wonder if a marriage was any good when you were sort of forced into it, and she'd know that Don was watching for the telltale signs.

You couldn't put your finger on it. On the surface, everybody had everything they wanted. Especially Olive.

Marysue appeased the Eater by being good to Olive. She gave Olive recipes, she loaned Olive clothes, she offered Olive a great deal of advice. After one of the bad evenings, when a particular song or a brief sequence of events made sections of the past vivid and painful, Marysue would go out of her way to do something helpful for the Alloways. It was one way of working out the torture and it was a way of soothing Don. Marysue had grown to know her husband well: he was a kind, generous man, and he was totally unable to take second place in anything.

During the third year, Marysue told Don she was worried about Olive. Ted was staying in the city nights, two or three times a week. "Do you suppose he's really working?" she asked Don. "I mean, Olive's a wonderful person and I couldn't bear it if he were putting something over on her. The only reason I mention it is that Mr. Hall, the taxi driver, the one with the funny hat, was saying the other day that he took Ted home one night last week and he was so loaded he could hardly weave up his own front path."

"I can't see that it should be any of our business," said her husband, "since we are not the Alloways' guardians. But Mr. Hall happens to be a romantic man. He spins fantasies about everybody in Elysia. Next time he says anything about Ted, just shut him up, will you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Marysue, "that's exactly what I did. I said, 'Look here, Mr. Hall, Ted Alloway happens to be our best friend and I don't think you should spread untrue stories about him.'"

"Okay," said Don. "You lose." He half-smiled at her.

Don's newspaper sent him to some small town or other a few days later and Marysue decided she should have a heart-to-heart talk with Ted over the telephone. Just to straighten things out for him and Olive. But when she called his office she was told that Mr. Alloway would be tied up until 3 o'clock with Miss Minton and a client.

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Marysue frowned. She knew who Miss Minton was. A large, beefy woman with sort of scary clothes, all very extreme. That didn't prove anything, of course, but if Ted *was* up to anything, wouldn't that be the easiest way in the world to cover it up? And combined with Mr. Hall's little tale, it was really beginning to look like a case of once a cad, always a cad. Human nature doesn't change. Mr. Roving Eye, the Jilter, was at it again.

Don called her that night. Long distance. He sounded terribly eager. "Hello, honey," he said. "I'm all finished with the story and I'm in a wonderful little inn. It's perfect. You could take a train at 9 tomorrow morning and get here in time for lunch and stay over a day or two. Come on, pet."

"Oh, I don't know," said Marysue. "I hate packing, and all that."

"It isn't an expedition. It's just for us. It's a hideaway . . . Marysue, please. We've been kind of lost, sort of, the past couple of weeks. Let's ditch the Alloways and everybody else and just . . . Please, honey."

Well, you had to humor somebody who was so nice one minute and so silly the next. As long as the quadrangle-situation existed, it was too dangerous to cross Don in anything. His temper was apt to be precarious.

It *was* a nice inn. It had a fireplace and good food and practically no people. Marysue slept late and Don went for an early walk. She got up and stretched poking around Don's things. His typewriter, in its beat-up black case, was on a rickety bridge table with some yellow copy paper in it . . .

The idea flashed brilliantly, winningly. A perfect solution to everybody's problems. Here was Marysue, hidden away in a place that Don would never, never mention to a soul. Nobody ever heard of this town, nobody at all. Suppose Olive were to get a little note, warning her to look out for trouble. It would accomplish such a lot; it would be efficient. The biting animal inside Marysue would be appeased. Olive would lose some of that unconscionable smugness. Ted would be made miserable by Olive's suspicions. And Don — well, Don would get some rest. There would be no further reason for him to bristle, to be waiting for — almost hoping for — tragedy.

Of course, there was the other side of the coin. Just for argument's sake, suppose it miraculously blew up. Suppose they all found out.

Marysue felt literally faint, for the scene she was picturing was realistic and fearful. Olive laughing her head off, Ted saying, "What do you know about a witch like that? She deserves whatever she's going to get," and Don saying, "You're quite a girl, aren't you? You married me when you were still tied to somebody else and you couldn't rest until you made trouble for him. You knew if you kept it up you'd lose me — only you

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didn't care about that. You had to work at it until you destroyed Ted and yourself and your marriage."

Only it was going to be all right. This was fool-proof, an uncriminal perfect crime. She sat down at Don's typewriter, adjusted the margins, and made several rough drafts before she settled on this:

Dear Mrs. Alloway:

Look out for what your husband is up to with a certain person in his office they are always together look out!!!

A Friend.

She and Don would be back in Elysia before anyone knew they were gone. This letter, this semi-illiterate letter, would come from a stranger in a strange town. It wasn't simply a few words on paper, it was peace, rest . . . and revenge.

Marysue closed her eyes in gratitude for having thought of it. . . .

The difficulty was that she didn't get a moment to herself while they were at the inn. Every time it looked as though she might be able to slip the letter into the mailbox, there was Don, right behind her. And he was positively adhering to her the next morning when they were waiting for their train.

Marysue had insisted on getting to the station early. A dozen times she slipped the envelope — all stamped and addressed, all very anonymous — halfway out of her bag and then she had to put it back because Don was looking. She tried sending him to the cigar stand to get a magazine, but he dragged her along with him.

Then Marysue said there was a darling place up the street with cute antiques. Why didn't Don just walk up and . . . Don said no. He said, "You go ahead. You've still got twenty minutes. I hate antiques, and if I'm not along you won't have enough money to buy anything."

Marysue decided to play *The Purloined Letter* in reverse. "Oh, all right," she said. "I want to mail this little note first. I've been carrying it around in my purse, and I just kind of forgot. I'll slip it in the box —"

"Oh, it's to Olive," said Don. Perversely, he took the note. "Well, if you must mail it from here, okay. I'll go inside the station and put it in the box for you while you toddle on to your shoppe."

Marysue nearly screamed with exasperation. "Well, I don't actually have to mail it from here," she said, as calmly as she could. "I mean, I want to respect your wishes about keeping this place a secret and everything . . ."

Don gave her a push. "Scat," he said. "Hurry on to your ugly little chairs and tables. Besides, the postal station isn't the same as the town where the inn is. We'll keep our hideout, don't worry."

"Well," said Marysue slowly. "It's just a memo to remind Olive of Thelma's birthday, that's all it is."

Suppose Olive ever showed the note to Don . . . suppose the whole

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thing came out and the dramatic, terrible scene occurred. . . . But that was nonsense. Marysue walked with little rapid clicks of her heels toward the antique shop and knew she was safe. Olive would rather die than let anyone know she didn't trust Ted, or let anyone know she was getting anonymous letters. And it would put things right, it would even the score.

Marysue was back in ten minutes. Don was sprawled on a wooden bench working out the crossword puzzle in the morning paper.

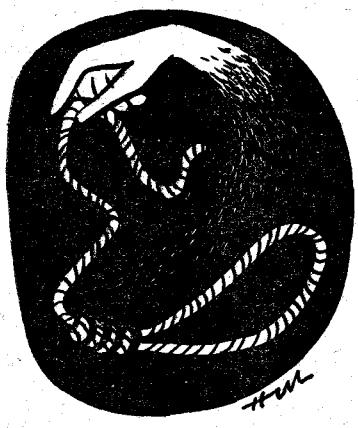
"They didn't have a thing," she said cheerfully. "Just a lot of old junk." Then, so very casually, "Did you mail the note?"

"Sure," said Don.

Marysue's breath came out in an imperceptible sigh of relief.

"As a matter of fact," said Don, filling in the squares of his puzzle, "you completely forgot to put down your return address. I had to write your name and home address on the back of the envelope."

He was still busy with his puzzle, so he didn't see his wife's face.



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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

ROGUE COP *by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN* (DODD, MEAD, $2.75)	"Hard-punching melodrama which is also a document of character and society." (AB)	". . . distinguished by splendid writing and almost unbearable suspense." (FP)
DEATH WON'T WAIT *by ANTHONY GILBERT* (RANDOM, $2.50)	"Plenty of provocative doings before Mr. Crook comes in to find the killer." (DBH)	"Mr. Crook . . . is in top form here . . . Gratefully received." (AdV)
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BEAT BACK THE TIDE *by DOLORES HITCHENS* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	". . . the best yet of Mrs. Hitchens' brooding and often chilling thrillers." (AB)	"This reader didn't care much." (DBH)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . great insight and power give . . . story the shattering impact of truth." (LGO)	". . . fast, tough and good. Highly recommended." (H-M)	
"Here's fun . . . sound plot, neat trapping of the murderer and plenty of momentum in the action." (LGO)	"Thank you, Anthony Gilbert, for a lovely evening." (H-M)	
"Kent Murdock's at his best in this fast-paced adventure." (FC)	"Swiftly paced, sharply plotted, neatly wrapped up." (DD)	
"Absolutely tops." (FC)	". . . puzzle is minor . . . picture of isolated life in Australia's vastness is unusually captivating." (DD)	
"Fast, amusing tale." (FC)	"An original and amusing mystery writers' mystery story." (FP)	
"Excessive Latinity marks this one for Joe College. Fancy-work." (SC)	". . . thin drama threaded into a remarkably exhaustive exercise in theory and deduction." (DD)	
"Really fine characterization plus the background makes this one noteworthy." (LGO)	"Capital diversion! Characters from freaks to spellbinders portrayed with brilliant humor." (DD)	
"Background excellent, in the infallible Hitchens manner." (LGO)	"Superabundance of atmosphere slows pace of well-handled yarn. Fifty-fifty." (SC)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

FP: *Fay Profilet in the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

Zenna Henderson is a native Arizonan — she confesses that she has never spent more than two months out of the state of Arizona in all her life. She has not been farther east than Denver, and her rare excursions away from Arizona include three short trips to the Pacific coast. Yet it is completely obvious from her writing that Miss Henderson knows people with a profound understanding of their thoughts and dreams, of their foibles and troubles. No, it is not necessary to travel the world for understanding: the deepest knowledge is right in your own backyard — didn't Emily Dickinson prove that for all time?

And yet, in her own way — in the most exciting way of all — Miss Henderson has traveled far beyond the boundaries of Arizona. Her secret kind of travel? Books. From the moment she first read SOAP *on the end of a P&G soap box, Miss Henderson has read almost as much as she has breathed; and since her favorite reading has been in the realm of fantasy, she sometimes feels, to quote Miss Henderson herself, "even more widely traveled than just from continent to continent." How true! And how interesting to learn that Miss Henderson sold her first story to Editors Boucher and McComas for "The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction."*

Miss Henderson is a schoolteacher. For the past seven years she has taught first grade at Balsz School in Phoenix. Before that she taught in other communities in Arizona, including a year at the Japanese Relocation Center at Rivers. Her prize-winning story is about — and this should come as no surprise — a teacher of six-year-old children, a subject she knows from first-hand experience. Kids, Miss Henderson has discovered, are kids — "no matter what the color, set of eyes, financial status, or degree of parental illusion." She likes to teach first grade best "because every year the world is new again, and every holiday comes as a most delightful climax in a world that has not yet lost its wonder and freshness."

Wonder and freshness — those very words might be used to describe Miss Henderson's writing. Indeed, she is one of the finest and freshest talents among the new writers in the fantasy field. But you will find realism rather than fantasy in Miss Henderson's "You Know What, Teacher?" Her teacher, Miss Peterson, will reveal to you the sense of duty and the viewpoint of those unappreciated, underpaid, and often maligned "kind hearts and gentle people" who do so much to mold our children while

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they are away from home. Yes, this is a story of a teacher's inordinate sense of responsibility, of her overwhelming sense of frustration, of her understanding and pity which so often go far beyond the demands of simple duty. And in this tender, sympathetic story you will find a great lesson — if you are a grown-up, and especially a parent.

YOU KNOW WHAT, TEACHER?

by ZENNA HENDERSON

MISS PETERSON LOOKED RESIGNEDLY around the school yard. Today was a running day. The children swept ceaselessly from one side of the playground to the other, running madly, sometimes being jet planes, sometimes cowboys, but mostly just running. She shifted a little as an angle of the wire fence gouged into her hip, sighed, and for the fourth time looked at her watch. Two minutes less of noon recess than the last time she had looked.

"You know what, teacher?" Linnet's soft little voice spoke at her elbow. "You know what my mother thinks?"

"What does your mother think?" asked Miss Peterson automatically as she weighed the chances of getting across the grounds to one of the boys — who was hanging head down from the iron railing above the furnace-room stairs — before he fell and broke his neck.

"My mother thinks my daddy is running around with another woman."

Miss Peterson's startled eyes focused on Linnet's slender little face.

"She does?" she asked, wondering what kind of answer you were supposed to give to a statement like that from a six-year-old.

"Yes," said Linnet; and she was swept away by another running group that left its dust to curl around Miss Peterson's ankles.

Miss Peterson passed the incident along to Miss Estes in the brief pause between loading the school buses and starting afternoon duties.

"Piquant detail, isn't it?" said Miss Estes. "It might do some of these parents good if they knew just how much of their domestic difficulties get passed on to us."

"It's a shame," said Miss Peterson. "I've thought for sometime that something was wrong at home. Linnet hasn't been doing well in her work and she's all dither-brained again. She'd be in my upper group if she could ever feel secure long enough."

Rain swept the closed windows with a rustly, papery sound. Miss Peterson tapped her desk bell and blessed the slight lull that followed. Rainy days

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were gruesome when you had to keep the children in. They were so accustomed to playing outdoors that the infrequent rainy-day schedules always meant even more noise-making than usual. In a few minutes she could call the class to order and then have a wonderful five-minute Quiet Time before the afternoon activities began.

"Teacher, Wayne keeps breaking down what I build!" protested Henry, standing sturdily before her, his tummy pushing through the four-inch gap between his blue jeans and his T-shirt.

"Well, he knocked down my garage and he keeps taking all my spools," Wayne defended, trying to balance the sixth spool at the top of his shaky edifice.

"You got more'n I have," retorted Henry as the towering structure fell, exploding spools all over the corner.

"You both know we're supposed to share," said Miss Peterson. "We don't fight over things like that. You'd better begin to put the spools away, anyway. It's almost Put-Away Time."

"You know what, teacher?" Linnet's voice was soft by her shoulder.

"W-h-a-t, that's what," laughed Miss Peterson, hugging Linnet's fragile body against her.

Linnet considered for a moment and then smiled.

"I mean, you know what happened at our house last night?"

"No, what?" The memory of the previous report from the domestic front sobered Miss Peterson.

"My mother and my daddy had a big fight," said Linnet. "Not a hitting fight — a holler fight."

"Oh?" Miss Peterson, still holding Linnet in the circle of her arm, reached for the bell and tapped the double Put-Away signal. The clatter crescendoed as puzzles, blocks, books, spools, and scissors were all scrambled into their respective storage spots.

"Yes," persisted Linnet. "I listened. Daddy said Mother spent too much money and Mother said she spent it for food and rent and not on women and she got so mad she wouldn't sleep in the bedroom. She slept all night on the couch."

"That's too bad," said Miss Peterson, hating battling parents as she looked into Linnet's shadowed face.

"I took her one of my blankets," said Linnet. "It was cold. I took her my blue blanket."

"That was nice of you," said Miss Peterson. "Honey, would you go help Lila get the doll house straightened out? It's almost Quiet Time."

"Okay, teacher." Linnet flitted away as soundlessly as she had come, one diminutive oxford trailing an untied lace.

Miss Peterson gnawed reflectively on a thumbnail.

"Parents!" she thought in exasperation. "Selfish, thoughtless, self-centered —! Thank Heaven most of mine are fair-to-middling!"

For the next few months the state of affairs at Linnet's house could have been charted as exactly as the season's temperatures. When she came hollow-

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eyed to school to fall asleep with a crayon clutched in one hand, it was either that Daddy had come home and they'd gone to the Drive-In Theater to celebrate, or Daddy had gone away again after a long holler fight the night before.

The school year rounded the holiday season and struggled toward spring. One day the children in Group Two sat in the reading circle studying a picture in their open primers.

"How is this bus different from ours?" asked Miss Peterson.

"It's got an upstairs," said Henry. "Ours don't got —" he caught Miss Peterson's eye — "don't *have* upstairses."

"That's right," nodded Miss Peterson. "How else is it different?"

"It's yellow," said Linnet. "Ours aren't yellow."

"Our school buses are," said Henry.

"They're really orange," said Linnet. "And when we go downtown, we ride on the great big gray ones."

"Well, let's read this page to ourselves and find out what these children are going to do," said Miss Peterson.

A murmuring silence descended, during which Miss Peterson tapped fingers that pointed and admonished lips that moved. Page by page, the story was gone through. Then tomorrow's story was previewed, and the reading group was lifting chairs to carry them back to the tables.

Linnet lingered, juggling her book under one arm as she held her chair.

"You know what, teacher?" she asked. "Last night we rode on the bus a long ways."

"Downtown?" asked Miss Peterson.

"Farther than that," said Linnet. "We even had to get off our bus and get on another one."

"My!" said Miss Peterson. "You must have had fun!"

"I almost didn't get to go," said Linnet. "Mother was going to leave me with Mrs. Mason, but she couldn't. We knocked on the front door and the back door but she wasn't home."

"So you got to have a pleasant ride after all, did you?" asked Miss Peterson.

"Mother cried," said Linnet. "All the way home."

"Oh, that's too bad." Miss Peterson's heart turned over at the desolation on Linnet's face.

"She didn't cry till we left the motel," said Linnet, lowering her chair to the floor and shifting her book. "You know what, teacher? The lady at the motel got mixed up. She told Mother that Mrs. Luhrs was in one of her cabins."

"Oh, did you go to the motel to visit some relatives?" asked Miss Peterson.

"We went to find Daddy. The lady said Daddy wasn't there, but Mrs. Luhrs was. But how could *she* be Mrs. Luhrs when *Mother* is Mrs. Luhrs? *She* wasn't in the cabin."

"Well," said Miss Peterson, wondering, as she had frequent occasion to, how to terminate a conversation with a child unobviously.

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"The money went *ding ding* in the box just like in our song," said Linnet.

"The money?"

"Yes, when we got on the bus. It went *ding ding* just like our song."

"Well, how pleasant!" cried Miss Peterson in relief. "Now you'd better get started on your writing or you won't have time for your fun-paper before lunch."

"It makes me so mad I could spit," she said later to Elsie Estes over the kerthump of the ditto machine she was cranking. The machine was spewing out pictures of slightly drunken cows, mooing at lopsided calves. She stopped and examined one of the pictures critically. "Well, they'll know what they're supposed to be — after I tell them."

Miss Peterson started the cranking again. "Why can't that mother manage to keep *something* from the child? There's no reason to drag Linnet through the nasty mess. Maybe if they had six kids, neither one of them would have time to — Do you want any of these, Elsie?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Miss Estes. "I don't know about that. Look at my Manuelo. He's got six brothers and sisters in school and only Heaven knows how many more at home, and papa turns up *muy borracho* nearly every payday and I get a blow-by-blow account of it next morning. Then Manuelo has a new papa for a while until the old papa beats the new papa up, and then it's all bliss and beans till papa goes on another toot."

"Well, I'm kind of worried. There, I gave you forty-five, just in case. I met Mrs. Luhrs at a PTA meeting several weeks ago. She looks — well, unstable — the mousy-looking kind that gives you a feeling of smoldering dynamite — if dynamite can smolder. Poor Linnet. I see now where she picked up the habit of pressing three fingers to her mouth. But I don't like it at all. Linnet's such a sweet child —"

"You could break your heart over any number of kids," said Miss Estes. "I found out long ago we can't reform parents and it's flirting with termination of contract if we try to. Remember how worried you were over your *Mexicano-chino* last year? Didn't do either one of you any good, did it?"

"No." Miss Peterson stacked tomorrow's work papers, crisscrossing them. "And he's in the Juvenile Home now and his father's in the insane asylum. Elsie, when my emotional storm signals go up, something's cooking. You wait and see."

Several weeks later, Linnet leaned against Miss Peterson's desk and asked, "How long more until lunch, teacher? I'm hungry."

"Not very long, Linnet. What's the matter, didn't you eat a good breakfast this morning?"

"I didn't eat *any* breakfast," said Linnet, her eyes half smiling as she awaited the expected reaction.

"No breakfast! Why, Linnet, we always eat a good breakfast. Why didn't you eat one this morning?"

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"I got up too late. I almost missed the bus."

"You'd better tell your mother to get you up earlier," said Miss Peterson.

"She didn't wake up, either," said Linnet. "The doctor gave her some sleeping stuff so she won't cry at night, and she didn't hear the alarm clock. She said one morning without breakfast wouldn't hurt me. But I'm hungry."

"I should think you would be. It's only fifteen minutes till lunch time, dear. That isn't very long."

Then, about a week later, Linnet came to school resplendent in a brand-new dress, carrying a huge box of crayons.

"Even a gold and a silver and a *white* one, teacher!" She was jiggling around excitedly, her newly set curls bobbing with an animation that they hadn't shown in months.

"You know what, teacher? Daddy came home last night. I woke up and I heard him tell Mother he was through with that doublecrossing bitch and he'd never go away again."

Before Miss Peterson could gather her scattered senses to question Linnet's terminology, the child was borne away by an enthusiastic mob of classmates who wanted to try out the gold and silver and white crayons and admire the new dress and the ruffled slip under it . . .

"How long do you suppose it will last?" asked Miss Estes at lunchtime over the Spanish rice at the cafeteria serving table. "The poor kid must feel like a yo-yo. Don't look now, but isn't that your Wayne squirting milk through his straw? He just made a bull's-eye in my Joanie's ear. Who'll do the honors this time — you or me?"

It lasted a month.

Then Linnet crept around again in the schoolroom, not even caring when Henry took her white crayon and chewed it reflectively into a crumbled mess that he had trouble spitting into the wastebasket when discovered. Again her three trembling fingers crept up to cover a quivering mouth. Again she forgot simple words she had known for months, and again she cried before trying new ones.

One day the reading group laughed over the story of Spot dragging the covers off Sally to wake her up. They all had wide-eyed stories to tell about how hard *they* were to wake up or how incredibly early they woke up by themselves. Then Miss Peterson was dismissing the group with her automatic, "Lift your chairs, don't drag them."

"You know what, teacher? That's just like Daddy and Mother this morning," said Linnet softly. "They didn't get out of bed, so I made my own breakfast and got ready for school, all by myself."

"My, you're getting to be a big girl, aren't you?"

"Yes. When I got up, I went in their bedroom but they weren't awake. I pulled the covers up for Mother because her shoulders were

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cold. Her nightgown hasn't got any sleeves."

"That was thoughtful of you," said Miss Peterson. "Who combed your hair for you if she didn't wake up?"

"I did." Linnet flushed. "I can get me ready."

"You did a pretty good job," acknowledged Miss Peterson, ignoring the crooked part and the tangled back curls.

When Linnet brought up the smudged, straggly writing paper that had again replaced her former neat and legible ones, Miss Peterson wondered why this morning, when Daddy was home, Linnet's work hadn't improved.

"You know what, teacher?" Linnet was saying. "Last night Mother promised she wouldn't cry any more, not ever again. And she said Daddy won't ever go away again."

"Isn't that fine?" asked Miss Peterson. "Now you can have lots of fun together, can't you?"

Linnet turned her head away. "Daddy doesn't like me any more."

"Oh, surely he does," protested Miss Peterson. "All daddies love their little girls."

Linnet looked up at her, her shadowy eyes and pale little face expressionless. "My daddy doesn't. Mother let me take him a cup of coffee last night while she was doing the dishes. He drank it and said, 'Hell, even the coffee around here is enough to turn your stomach. Beat it, brat.' And he pushed me and I dropped the empty cup and it broke."

"But if he isn't going away any more —"

"Mother told me *that*." Linnet's eyes were full of unchildlike wisdom. "She told me lots of times before. But she didn't hear Daddy swear."

"Well, it'll be nice if your mother doesn't cry any more."

"Yes," said Linnet. "When she cries, I cry too."

Miss Peterson watched Linnet go back to her table and start her funpaper. Poor cherub, she thought . . .

"Do you suppose I ought to *do* something about it?" she asked Miss Estes in the cafeteria.

"Do what?" asked Miss Estes. "Call the sheriff because a father swore at his child and called her a brat?"

"You know it's more than that. An unwholesome home environment."

"What would you do?" asked Miss Estes, nibbling her square of cheese. "Take her away from them? In that case you'd have to take half the kids in the nation away from their parents. Nope, as long as she's fed and clothed and carries no visible scars, you can't invoke the law."

"Maybe I could talk with her mother."

"My, you are a neck-sticker-outer, aren't you? She'd probably spit in your eye."

"I'm awfully uneasy —"

"It's the beans. They didn't cook them long enough today."

After the buses had gone, Miss Peterson saw a lonely little figure sitting in one of the swings.

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"Oh, whirlyberries!" she thought. "Who missed the bus this time?" She sighed in resignation and went over to the swings.

"Hi, teacher!"

"Why, Linnet! How did you ever come to miss the bus?"

"I didn't miss it. Mother told me not to come home on the bus today. She said someone would come after me."

"Is she busy somewhere this afternoon?" Miss Peterson dropped into the swing next to Linnet, savoring the quiet of the empty playground.

"I don't know." Linnet was opening and shutting a little blue-and-white box.

"What's that?" asked Miss Peterson.

"It's empty," Linnet's voice defended. "Mother wouldn't care. She lets me play with empty boxes. But not with medicine in them."

"That's right," said Miss Peterson. "We never play with boxes that have medicine in them."

"Mother got this at the drug store yesterday. It had medicine in it *then*."

"Yesterday?" Miss Peterson was surprised. "But it's all gone."

"It was Mother's sleeping stuff." Linnet snapped the box shut again.

Miss Peterson was curious. "Let me see it, Linnet." She took the box and turned it over in her hand. There was only a prescription number and *Take as directed* on it.

"You know what, teacher? She put an awful lot of sugar in Daddy's coffee before I brought it to him, and he doesn't like very much sugar. Maybe *that's* why he got mad last night."

"Could be," said Miss Peterson grimly. "Where did you get this box, Linnet?"

"It was on Mother's dresser by her coffee cup. When I went in this morning to see if they were awake, I found it. It was empty. I took her cup back to the kitchen."

Miss Peterson sat eying the box for a long minute. Of course it couldn't be. Children so often exaggerate and draw mistaken conclusions. Add to that an overly imaginative teacher and you could dream up some mighty weird situations. But. . . .

"Let's play something while you're waiting," she said. "Let's play What Comes Next. You know, like we do with the picture stories in our work books."

"Okay, teacher!" Linnet's eyes lighted with pleasure.

"Now," said Miss Peterson. "Your mother started to wash the dishes last night. What Comes Next?"

"And I got to dry the knives and forks and spoons!" added Linnet.

"Yes. Then your mother poured your daddy's coffee. What Comes Next?"

"Oh, you missed What Comes Next!" laughed Linnet. "Mother put a lot of the sleeping stuff in Daddy's cup. She said Daddy was getting restless. *Then* she poured the coffee."

"Then you took it to your daddy?"

"Uh-uh! First I had to get Mother a hankie because she was crying. *Then* I took it to Daddy."

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Miss Peterson massaged the goose bumps above each elbow.

"And then your daddy drank it." Miss Peterson's voice was flat. "What Comes Next?"

Linnet swung herself to and fro without letting her feet move.

"I don't know," she said, her face averted.

"You said you dropped the cup —" half-questioned Miss Peterson, sensing the withdrawal.

"Yes — yes, I dropped the cup when Daddy got mad and pushed me."

"Yes," said Miss Peterson, knowing Linnet was deliberately forgetting. The two sat in silence a while, then Miss Peterson took up the thread again.

"When it got dark, you got ready for bed and your mother and daddy said good night."

"Not Daddy," said Linnet. "He went to bed before I did last night. He yawned and yawned and went to bed. And then I went to bed and Mother woke me up and hugged me and told me she wouldn't ever cry again and that Daddy wouldn't ever leave her again. And then — and then —" Linnet's forehead creased and her three grubby little fingers came up to cover her soft, dismayed mouth. "Oh, teacher! You know what? She gave me a note to give you and I wasn't even absent yesterday!"

"Where is it?" Miss Peterson felt her innards sinking into some endless nothingness. "Did you lose it?"

"No," cried Linnet triumphantly. "She put it in my shoe so I wouldn't."

She pulled off the scuffed little oxford and fished inside it. Finally she came up with two grimy pieces of paper.

"Oh!" she was shocked. "It came in two. Is it spoiled?"

"No," said Miss Peterson, taking the two pieces and fitting the folds together. "No, I think I'll be able to read it."

She sat in the swaying swing, watching vagrant papers rise and circle in a sudden whirlwind and then drift lazily to the ground again. And she wished with all her heart that she didn't have to read the note.

Then, conscious of Linnet's eyes upon her, she unfolded the halves of paper.

Please don't let Linnet ride the bus home. Call AR 2-9276 when school is over. Ask them to keep her for a day or two until her grandmother comes.

Thank you,
Linnell Luhrs

Miss Peterson tasted the phone number again with silently moving lips. It tasted of her little *Mexicano-chino* — the Juvenile Home.

"What does it say, teacher?" asked Linnet.

"It says for you not to go home on the bus," said Miss Peterson, her thumbnail straightening out a curl of the paper. "You're to wait."

She looked down at the cramped, close-written line that slanted sharply below the signature.

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God forgive me. I couldn't let him go away again.

"Well." Miss Peterson stood up, feeling old and tired. "I have to go to the office and make a phone call. You stay here and play. Remember, don't go away. Don't move away from here."

"I won't," Linnet promised. "You know what, teacher?"

Miss Peterson looked down into Linnet's dark eyes. "No, what?"

"It's kinda lonesome here, all alone," said Linnet.

"Yes, it is, dear," said Miss Peterson, blinking against the sting in her eyes. "It is kinda lonesome, all alone."

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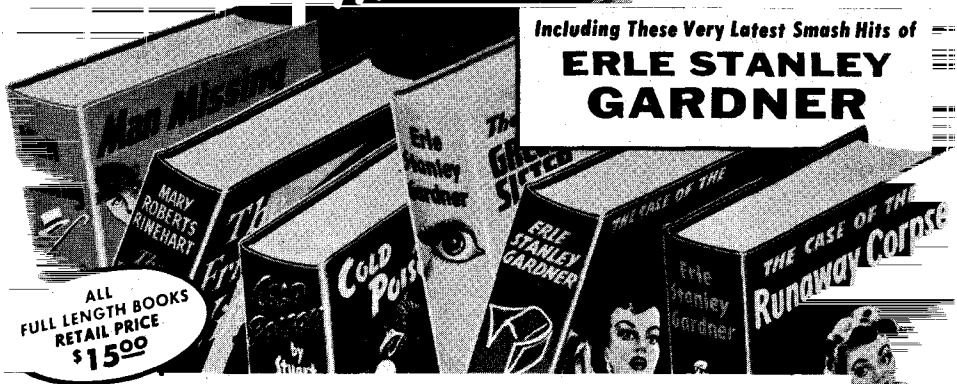

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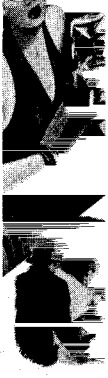

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